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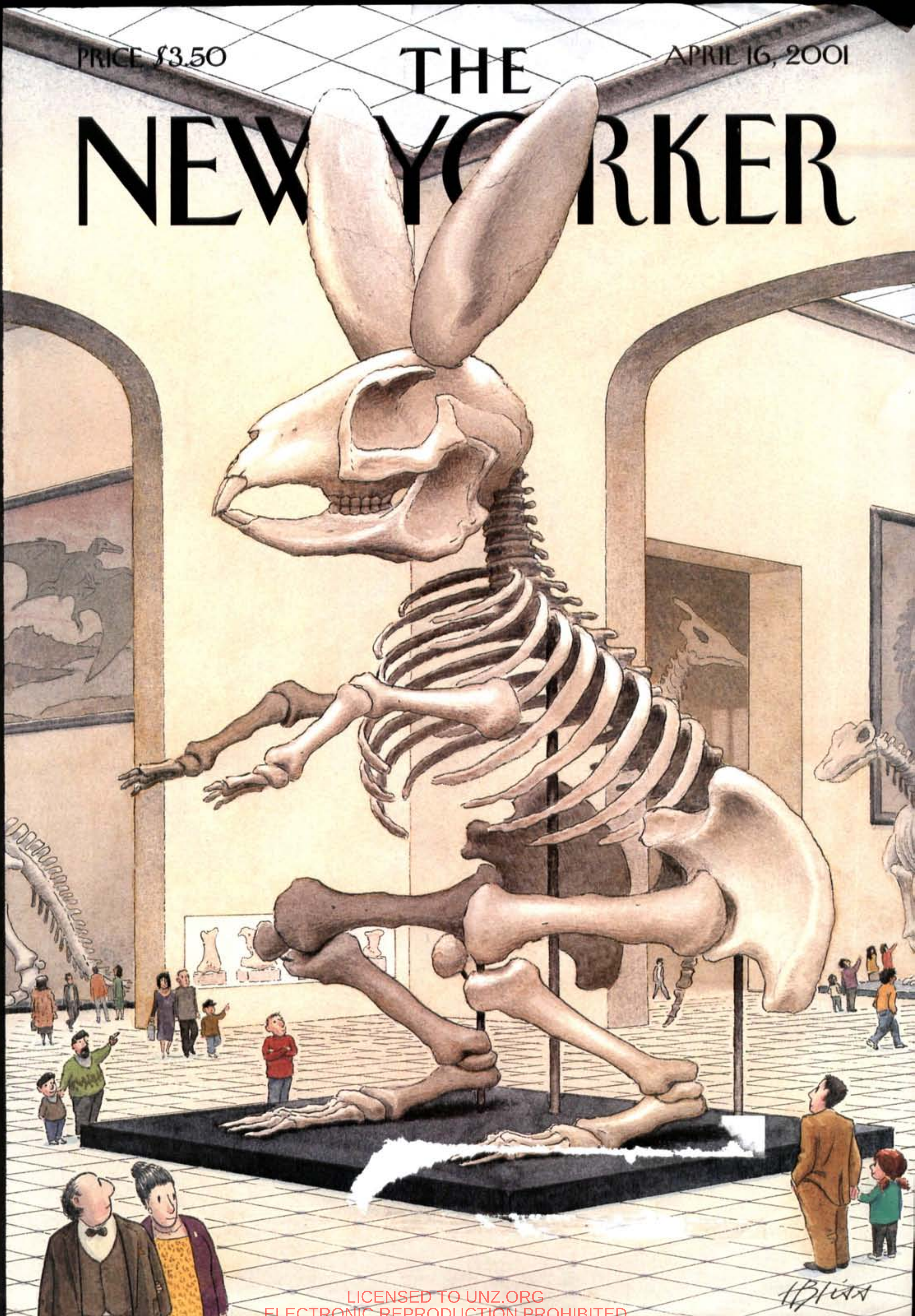
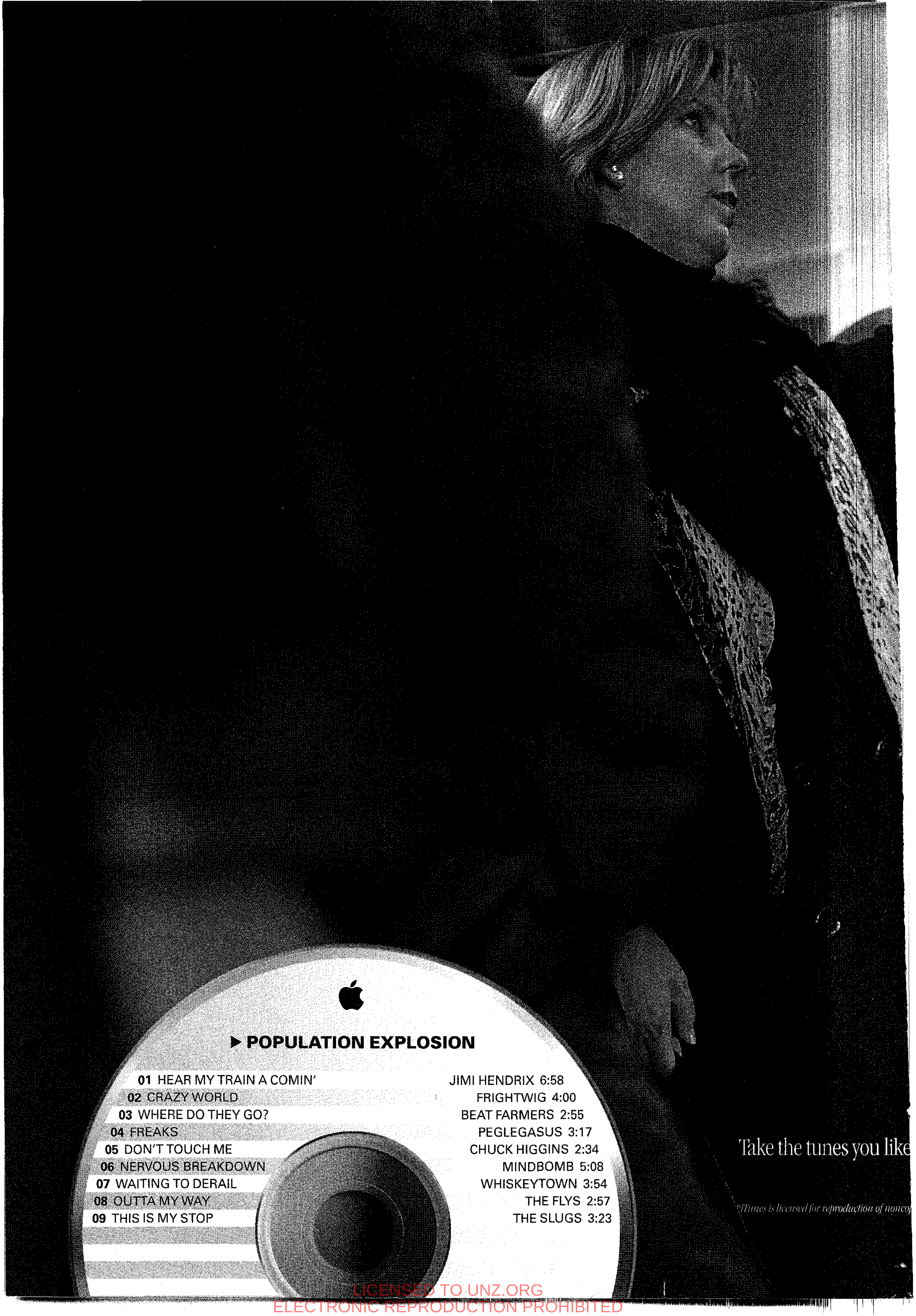
THE NEW YORKER

APRIL 16, 2001





POPULATION EXPLOSION

01	HEAR MY TRAIN A COMIN'	JIMI HENDRIX 6:58
02	CRAZY WORLD	FRIGHTWIG 4:00
03	WHERE DO THEY GO?	BEAT FARMERS 2:55
04	FREAKS	PEGLEGASUS 3:17
05	DON'T TOUCH ME	CHUCK HIGGINS 2:34
06	NERVOUS BREAKDOWN	MINDBOMB 5:08
07	WAITING TO DERAIL	WHISKEYTOWN 3:54
08	OUTTA MY WAY	THE FLYS 2:57
09	THIS IS MY STOP	THE SLUGS 3:23

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THE NEW YORKER

APRIL 16, 2001

8 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
27 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Forever Rudy; baseball vs. the press.

Adam Gopnik 34 NEW YORK JOURNAL
Just a Bar
Tribeca, blue margaritas, and a landmark.
Bruce McCall 40 SHOUTS & MURMURS
Parents Vie for Top School Turndowns
James Collins 42 OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS
One Year Later
How the fashion system found a new star.
John Lahr 50 PROFILES
Been Here and Gone
August Wilson's century of black culture.
Ann Beattie 66 FICTION
"That Last Odd Day in L.A."

THE CRITICS
Peter Schjeldahl 78 THE ART WORLD
Vermeer's appeal.
BOOKS
Ian Buruma 82 *David Irving's trial.*
87 Briefly Noted
Nancy Franklin 88 THE THEATRE
"Stones in His Pockets."
Anthony Lane 90 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Bridget Jones's Diary," "Chopper."

POEMS
Frederick Seidel 58 "Chiquita Gregory"
Robin Robertson 80 "Thermal"

COVER *"Bunnyasaurus," by Harry Bliss* THE BACK PAGE *"Kinder, Gentler New I.R.S. Offers Visitors Free Coffee," by Bruce McCall* DRAWINGS *Danny Shanahan, Mick Stevens, Alex Gregory, Leo Cullum, Donald Reilly, J. B. Handelsman, Robert Weber, Jack Ziegler, Charles Barsotti, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Arnie Levin, Roz Chast, J. C. Duffy, Frank Cotham, William Hamilton, David Sipress, William Haefeli, Michael Crawford*

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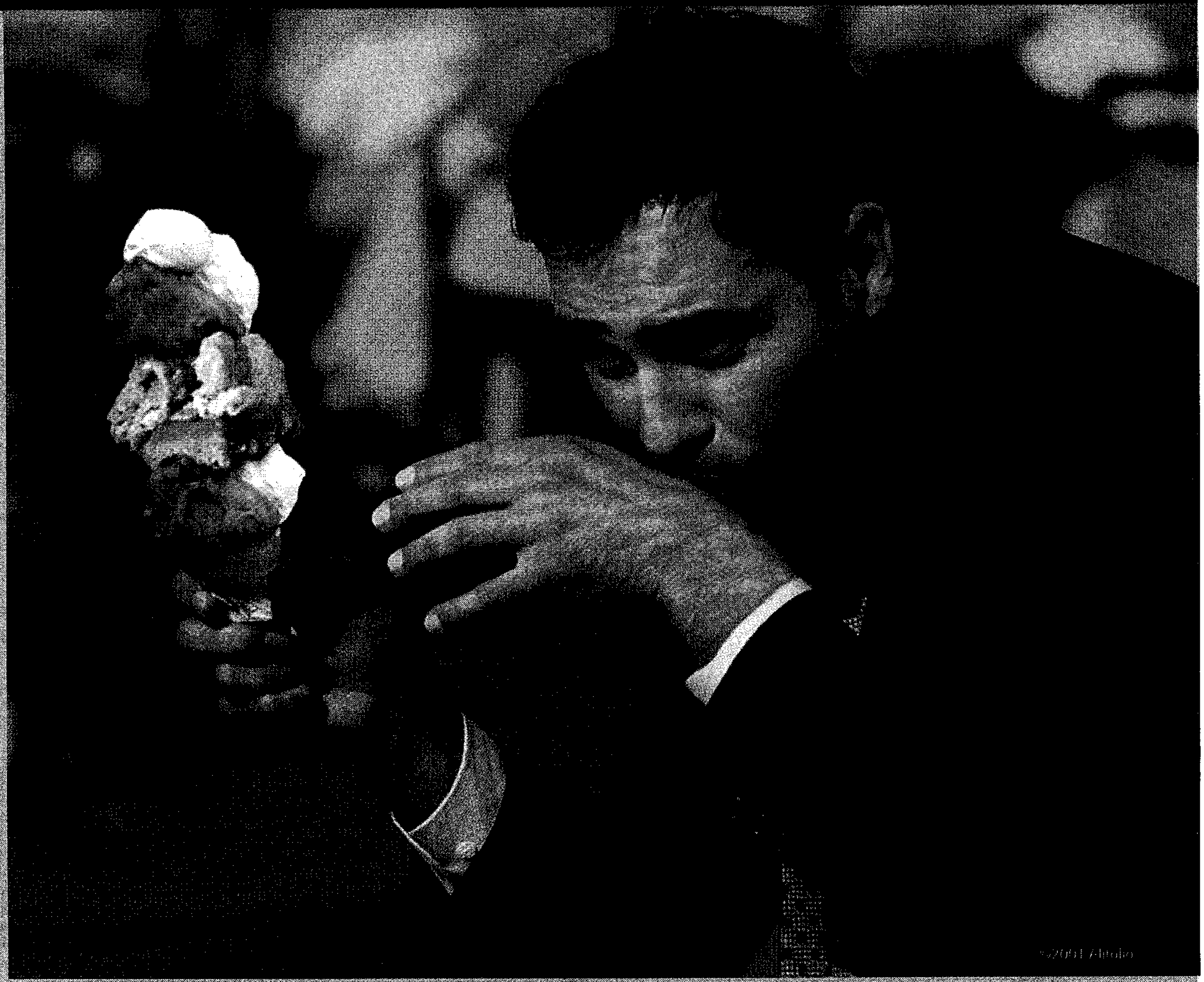

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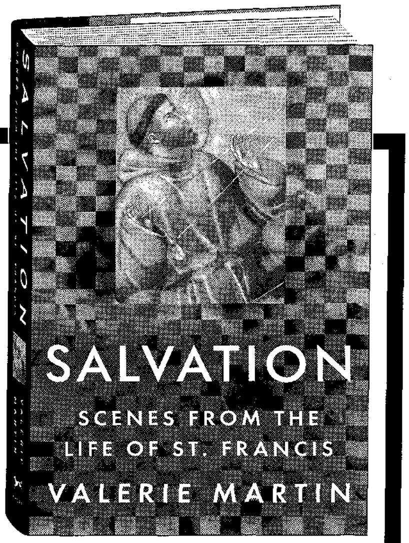

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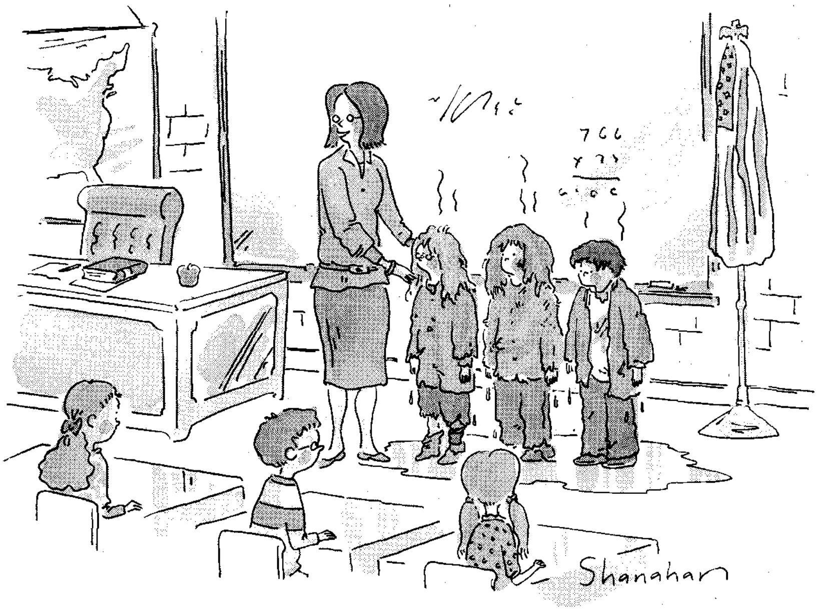
Benoît van Innis (Sketchbook, p. 60) recently published "Bravo! Bravo!," a book of drawings and paintings. ♦



"Now that the playground's thawed, let's welcome back Mary Redmond, Sarah Turpin, and Hector D'Amico."

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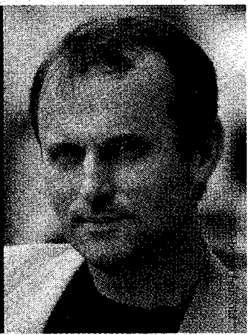

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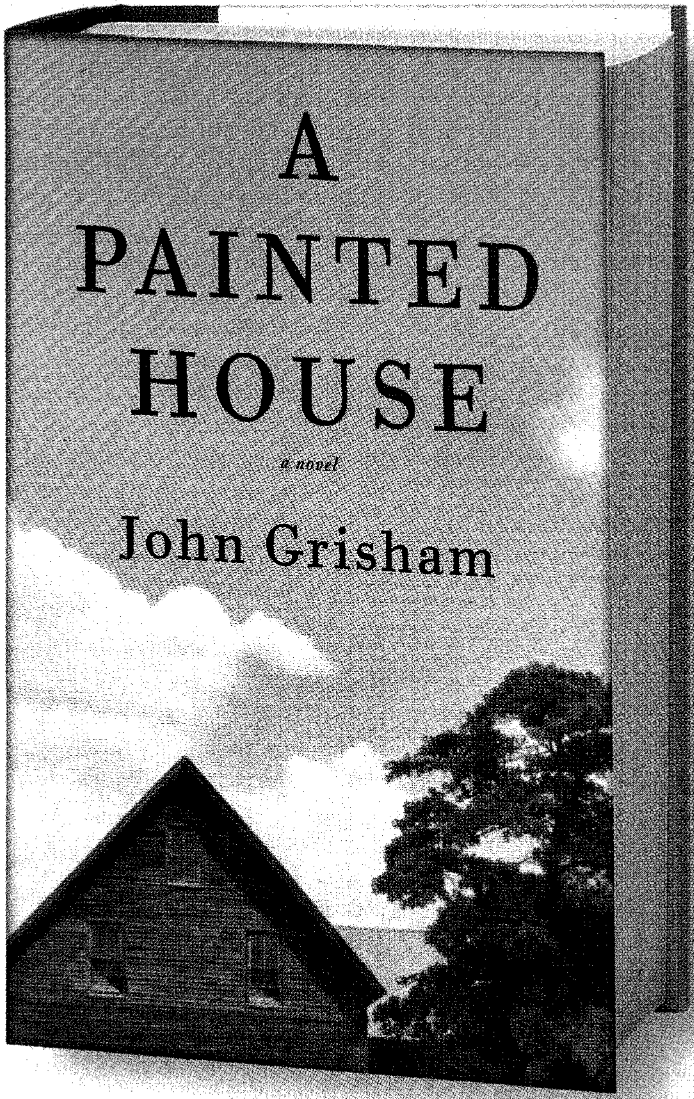

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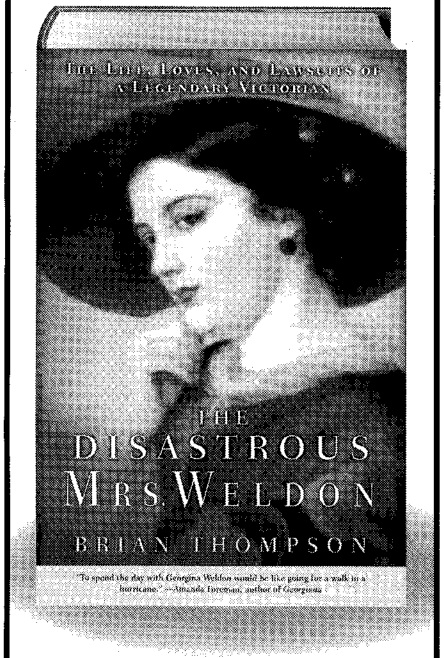
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—*The Sunday Times* (London)

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THE MAIL

CONE'S LAST PITCH

Roger Angell's piece on the former Yankee pitcher David Cone brought back some painful memories ("Before the Fall," March 26th). I was a major-league pitcher for fifteen years, from 1970 to 1984, before my arm went south, and, like Cone, I wrestled with the decision to retire almost every day of my last season. I dreamed, as many players do, of going out like Ted Williams, who hit that dramatic home run in his last career at-bat, in 1960, in Fenway Park. There were still three games in the season, so he had a few more at-bats coming, but he chose to end it all with that showstopper. For my last pitch, I settled for a fastball away that the Royals' Jorge Orta popped up, to end a scoring threat, and then I packed up my glove for good; I knew that it was time. I wonder about Cone's desire to come back again. He should reserve for himself the dignity of saying farewell on his own terms, before someone does it for him. Popping up Mike Piazza in last year's World Series wasn't enough for him. This year, he should aim for one great start—say, a seven-inning job of no runs, a few hits, seven or eight strikeouts. If he walks off the mound, proudly tips his hat to fans, and says, "I'm done, it's over," it won't get any better than that.

John Curtis
Long Beach, Calif.

WHAT GOLDWATER WANTED

Louis Menand is too generous in concluding that Goldwater put himself in an alliance with Southern segregationists which "he had not desired" (Books, March 26th). Goldwater knew what he wanted: he was aware of where William Rehnquist and Robert Bork stood before he asked for their analysis of the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act. They gave him the rhetorical cover to vote against the Act, in what he saw as his political self-interest. Goldwater, as Menand notes, urged Republican activists "to stop chasing the votes of African-Americans" and used a campaign slogan "aimed directly at" segregationists: "In Your Heart, You Know He's Right." This use of code words to divide poor whites from blacks was neither an accident nor the reluctant act of an honest constitutionalist; it was the Republican Party's Southern strategy.

Sean R. O'Halloran
San Jose, Calif.

FATHERS AND SLAVES

John Seabrook, in discussing his attempts to use DNA tests to fill out his genealogy—and his ambivalence about his possible kinship with a grand slaveholding family—writes, "It is remotely possible that [African-American] Seabrooks share some of my DNA, but it seemed insensitive to ask them to take the test in order to find out" ("The Tree of Me," March 26th). My nephew and my brother-in-law, a Seabrook whose family is from Edisto Island, South Carolina, already knew that their ancestors were slaves on the Seabrook plantation—and were perhaps among those who built the magnificent staircase in its mansion. We have traced our family to colonial Jamaica, Africa, and Scotland. Like Seabrook, I was struck by the endurance of names; I discovered that distinctive nicknames that had been in our family for generations were common in the Twi language of Ghana's Akan people, in the hills of Akwapim. I compared my father's DNA to that of three dozen men from that area; their DNA matched. I do not know if my nephew and my brother-in-law share the slaveholding Seabrooks' DNA, or only their name, for neither chose to learn more about the family that enslaved his ancestors. But, whatever their relation, they share a history.

Pearl Duncan
New York City

•

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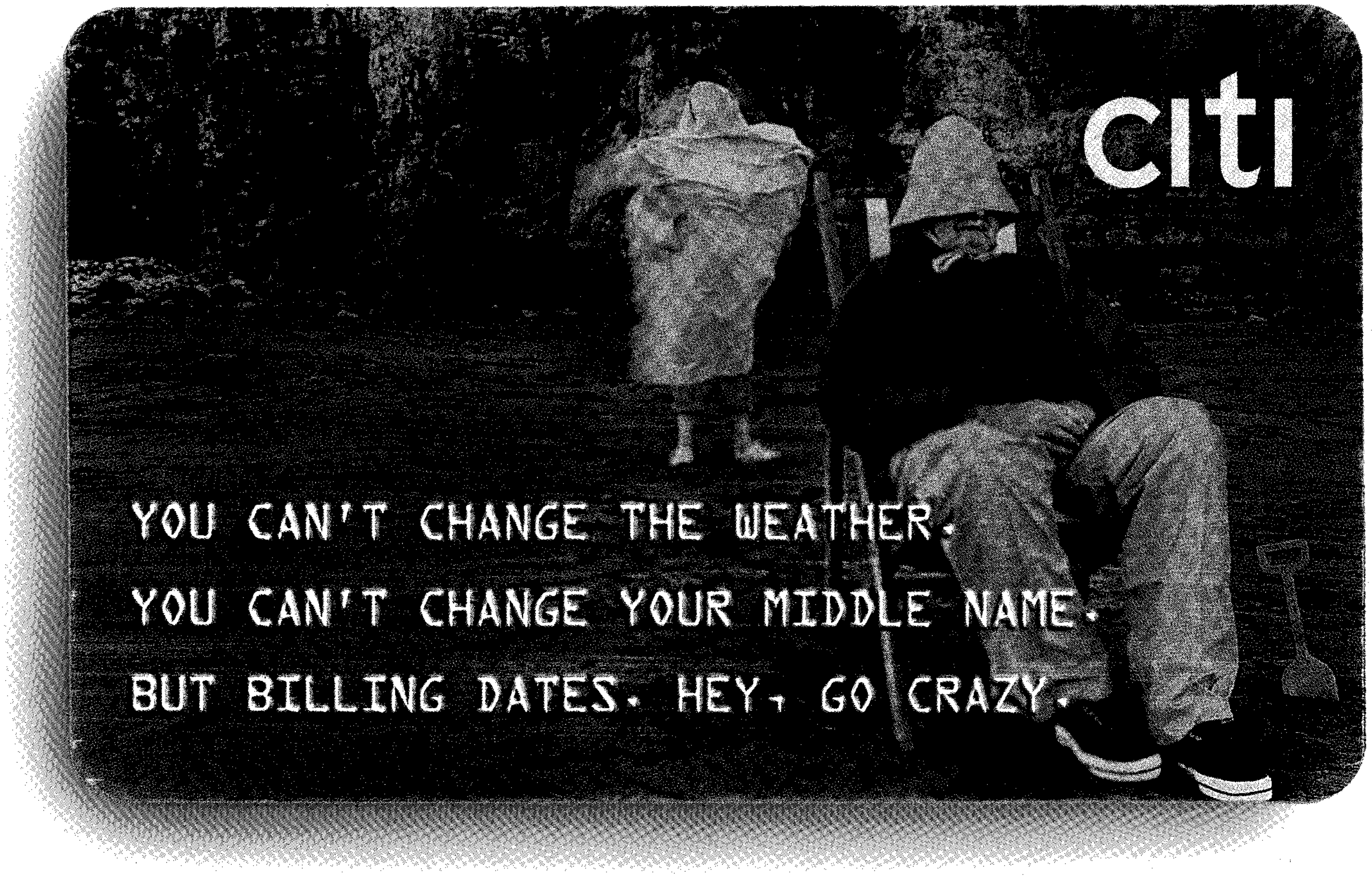
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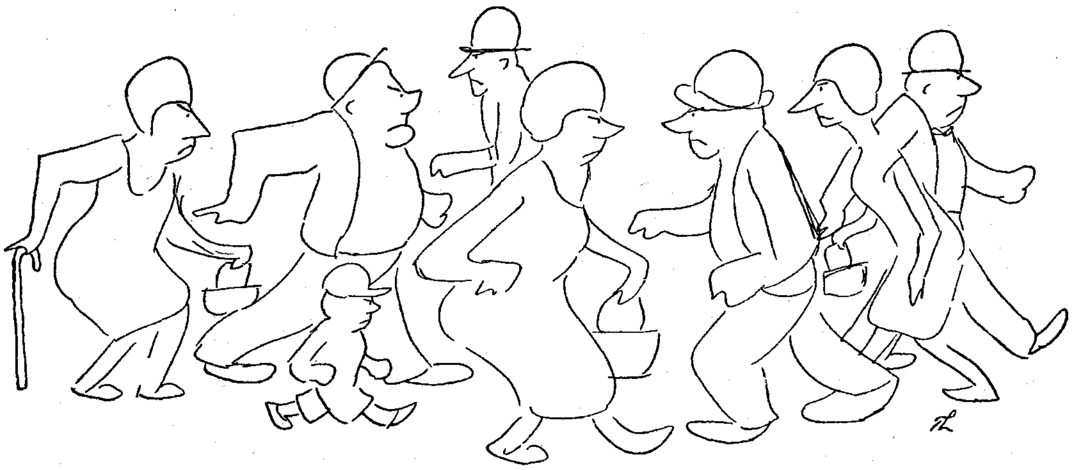

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER
The musical. With a score by Don Schlitz and a book by Ken Ludwig. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews. (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 307-4100.)

BELLS ARE RINGING
Faith Prince and Marc Kudisch lead the cast in a revival of the 1956 Betty Comden–Adolph Green–Jule Styne musical. Tina Landau is the director. Two previews on April 11. Opens April 12 at 6:45. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

BLAST!
A musical extravaganza, which evolved from the drum-and-bugle corps Star of Indiana. In previews through April 15. Opens April 17 at 7. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

CRIMES OF THE HEART
Garry Hynes directs a Second Stage revival of Beth Henley's 1981 play, starring Enid Graham, Amy Ryan, and Mary Catherine Garrison. In previews through April 15. Opens April 16 at 6:30. (307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

THE DEAD EYE BOY
Lili Taylor leads the cast in a drama by Angus MacLachlan, about a woman trying to escape a past filled with drug abuse and violence. In previews. (MCC Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765.)

ELI'S COMIN'
A musical inspired by the songs of Laura Nyro, co-created by Diane Paulus and Bruce Buschel. In previews. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

FORTY-SECOND STREET
Michael Cumpsty, Christine Ebersole, Mary Testa, and Jonathan Freeman star in a revival of the 1980 musical comedy. In previews. (Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

THE GATHERING
Hal Linden portrays a Holocaust survivor in Arje Shaw's drama about three generations of a Jewish family. Rebecca Taylor is the director. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

KING HEDLEY
August Wilson's new play revisits the locale (Pittsburgh's Hill District) and some of the characters from his 1995 drama, "Seven Guitars." Brian Stokes Mitchell leads the cast. In previews. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

LACKAWANNA BLUES
Ruben Santiago-Hudson performs his memory play about growing up in Lackawanna, New York, in the fifties. In previews through April 13. Opens April 14 at 8. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

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MADAME MELVILLE
Macaulay Culkin is a fifteen-year-old American student and Joely Richardson his French teacher, in a drama by Richard Nelson, set in nineteen-sixties Paris. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

THE PRODUCERS
Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane star in Mel Brooks's musical version of his 1968 movie, under the direction of Susan Stroman. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

SAINT LUCY'S EYES
Ruby Dee portrays an abortionist in Memphis during the Civil Rights movement, in a drama by Bridgette A. Wimberly. In previews through April 11. Opens April 12 at 7. (Women's Project Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA
Theatre for a New Audience presents Shakespeare's play, under the direction of Sir Peter Hall. In previews through April 14. Opens April 15 at 7. (American Place Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

UNCLE BOB
In a new play by Austin Pendleton, George Morfogen portrays a man dying of AIDS and Gale Harold his homophobic nephew. In previews. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL
A musical comedy by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis, about a state of ecological disaster. John Rando is the director. In previews. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL
At the very least, the entrepreneurs of this gleeful nihilism (book by Keythe Farley and Brian Flemming, music and lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe, direction by Scott Schwartz) have the courage of their lack of convictions. It's a kind of "My Fair Bat Boy," in which a half-bat, half-man—memorably played by Deven May, as a cross between Freud's Wolf Man, Michael Crawford's Phantom, and Jerry Lewis's spastic—emerges from his childhood cave into adult bourgeois life. But the musical world he enters is one of darkness, not light, of ironies, not idealism, where plot is a history of abdications and song extolls the emptiness of all the standard credos—Christianity, family, community, love, redemption—and of the musical itself. It's a jejune vision, but a smart, playful, and funny one nonetheless. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/01.) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

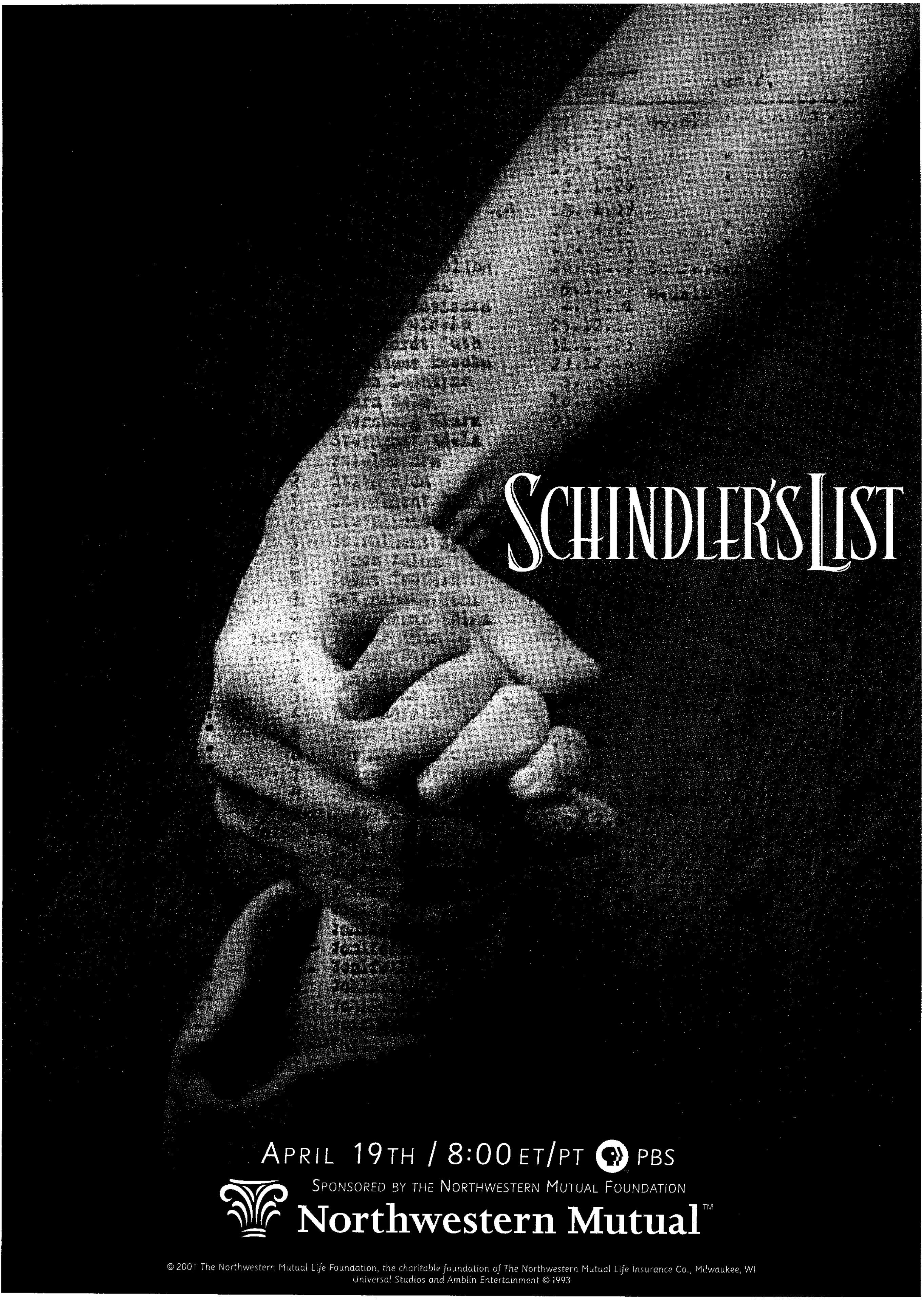
THE BOOK OF LIZ
In the latest comedy by the brother-and-sister team of Amy and David Sedaris, Ms. Sedaris portrays the sweating, mousy Elizabeth, a demure Puritan believer from the religious Squeamish Community who goes on a picaresque adventure after being refused the honor of organizing the Chastity Parade. In the course of her travels, she gets to wear a Planter's-peanut outfit and work in a restaurant called Plymouth Crock, which is populated entirely, it seems, by gay A.A. members. She even seeks medical help for her perspiration problem. As comic drama, it's sort of an amateur fizzle, but it does offer the Sedarises the opportunity to tell some very good jokes in silly costumes and to bask in the smug downtown certainty of a soiled world. (4/9/01) (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

A CLASS ACT
Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With songs by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. Mr. Price is the director. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

CODE OF THE WEST
Mark R. Giesser's play about the San Franciscan Joshua A. Norton, who proclaimed himself emperor of the United States and protector of Mexico in the eighteen-fifties. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

DESIGN FOR LIVING
To be great, comedy must be cruel, and that is why it is usually written by the young. Though he wrote it when he was only thirty-four, Noël Coward's (then scandalous) 1933 tale of an insouciant ménage à trois (Jennifer Ehle, Dominic West, and Alan Cumming) is more a lecture masquerading as theatre; it's too schematic and too self-important for the cruelty to play out in surprising ways. Here, the director Joe Mantello has encouraged the scenic designer Robert Brill to go gargantuan with the sets, as a kind of metaphor for the characters' grandiosity, and it's a choice that unwittingly emphasizes the gimcrack quality of the play's structure. Otherwise, the production is superbly cast and well focussed. (3/26/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

FOLLIES
A Roundabout Theatre Company revival of James Goldman and Stephen Sondheim's 1971 musical, starring Blythe Danner, Gregory Harrison, Judith



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ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Prepare for Battle

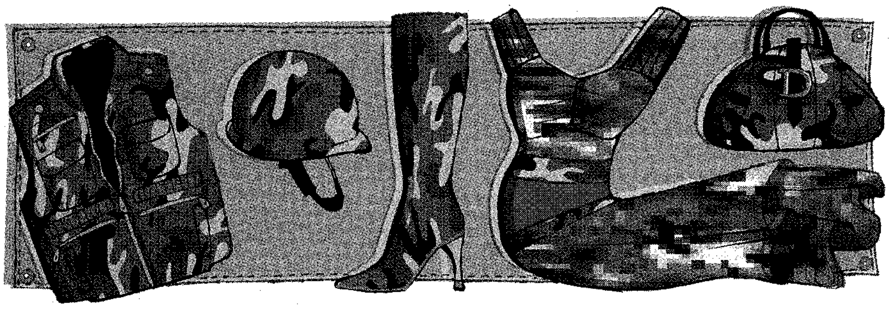
Not content to wrap a camouflage scarf around her neck or stick a pair of khaki mules on her feet, the salesperson on the second floor of the **CHRISTIAN DIOR** flagship store (21 E. 57th St.; 931-2950) has paired a tiny, intensely stylish fatigue jacket with a skirt of rough brown hide which looks rugged enough to withstand a land-and-sea invasion but is in fact as pliant as parachute silk.

"Camouflage is the new leopard—it's a staple in our collection," says the shop's manager, quoting John Galliano, Dior's current house designer. In previous seasons, Galliano has proposed clochard dresses trailing pots and pans, and evening gowns printed with pages of the *International Herald Tribune*. This year, he has filled the Dior store with camouflage-print saddle bags, belts, scarves, pouches, purses, wallets, and even a pair of canvas knee-high boots with heels sharp enough to take out an enemy's eye ($595).

Galliano is apparently not alone in his belief that the long-lost thrill of sweeping into the Stork Club in a spotted-cat coat can be recaptured by trooping to Moomba in a camo slip dress. At **COMME DES GARÇONS** (520 W. 22nd St.; 604-9200), a store with a silvery metal-tube entrance and an egg-shaped glass door, located on a west-Chelsea block between the High Line trestle and the Chelsea Piers sports complex, combat clothes have likewise surfaced. Rei Kawakubo, the eccentric responsible for this collection (in the past, she's cooked up dresses with tumorlike lumps and offered a scent redolent of photocopier toner), has a man's jacket of blue-and-white checked gingham that has been overlaid with violent maroon leaf-pattern splotches ($615). Elsewhere, she plays tricks with materials: a woman's jacket, inset with a patent-leather camouflage belt, seems to be made of polka-dot silk but turns out to be polyester ($988). On the other hand, a camo-trimmed dress ($1,365) you'd swear was cut from a plastic shower curtain is in fact made of some kind of highly temperamental silk. ("The print will crack or peel with repeated wear and cleaning," the care label reads. "Handle with care. The tape will loosen and the raw edges will fray with wear and cleaning. Hand wash in a net bag with a mild detergent.")

Those seeking militaria that can withstand the rigors of the laundry room, let alone Desert Storm, might be happier at **WEISS & MAHONEY** (142 Fifth Ave.; 675-1915), a place that's been selling surplus since 1924, long before tin cans and tumors occupied the minds of fashion designers. Among a profusion of regulation army duds are a number of items that somehow escaped the Gallianos and Kawakubos of the world: woodland-pattern trousers with drawstring cuffs ($30), canvas-covered helmets, ranger vests with cartridge loops, and a poncho liner that comes with a caveat: "Caution: do not fasten the snap fasteners together when used as a sleeping bag in combat areas, it cannot be opened quickly." But not everything here offers protective coloration. There are also blue-and-white boatneck sailor shirts ($30), which bring to mind Jean Genet prowling the Marseilles piers and might just be crowding the shelves of designer boutiques this time next year.

—*Lynn Yaeger*



EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Ivey, and Treat Williams. Matthew Warchus is the director. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE GOOD THIEF
Brian D'Arcy James portrays a petty criminal who botches a heist, in a drama by Conor McPherson. (45 Bleecker Street, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

HOORAY FOR ICEBOY
The latest comedy from the Adobe Theatre Company, in which explorers introduce one of their discoveries to the theatre world in the forties. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

THE INVENTION OF LOVE
Tom Stoppard's witty, challenging account of the classicist and poet A. E. Housman and the love that not only dared not speak its name but didn't even have one until 1895 (when the word "homosexual" was coined). Jack O'Brien's well-directed, lucid production features a sumptuous set by Bob Crowley and some fine acting, especially by Richard Easton as the elder/dead Housman—he parses every sentence and joke so that the audience is never at sea—and Robert Sean Leonard as the young classicist in love. David Harbour also turns in a vivid portrait as the sporty object of Housman's platonic affection. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

JANE EYRE
John Caird and Paul Gordon's musical is respectful of and faithful to Brontë's original, but it needs to be brilliant and piercing, and it isn't. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

JENNIE RICHEE
The Ridge Theatre, the playwright Mac Wellman, and the composer Julia Wolfe collaborated on this multimedia play inspired by the life and work of Henry Darger, an American outsider artist who died in 1973. April 11-14 at 8. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793.)

JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG
Maximilian Schell and George Grizzard lead the cast in the Abby Mann drama. John Tillinger is the director. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6280.)

LOBBY HERO
In another era, the contrivances in Kenneth Lonergan's new play, set in the lobby of a Manhattan apartment house, would have been called hokum. But because Lonergan is the writer and director of the moving and successful film "You Can Count on Me" and the author of the highly praised plays "This Is Our Youth" and "The Waverly Gallery," the public is expecting him to aim high. Instead, Lonergan aims low and misses. Mark Brokaw is the director. (3/26/01) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes April 14.)

MNEMONIC
For sheer theatrical aplomb—the exhilarating marriage of the surreal body to the surreal intellect—nothing can top the latest show by the actor and director Simon McBurney and his Theatre de Complicite. It begins with McBurney in manic cogitation on the subject of memory. Then the audience is allowed to peer into McBurney's brain, as the three stories he tells—his own, the tale of his girlfriend's disappearance, and the strange history of the discovery in a glacier of the five-thousand-year-old body of a man—crosscut and careen around the stage. With startling images, sounds, and shifts of focus, the stories unravel with the lucidity, the detachment, and the surprise of a Magritte to remind us that we ourselves are a work of fiction, and that remembering is an act of imagination. (4/9/01) (John Jay College, 899 Tenth Ave., at 58th St. 239-6200.)

THE NEW WONDERTWINS IN SPARKLEVISION
A new extravaganza from the performance duo of Rebecca Finnegan and Susan Blackwell, directed by Gary Schwartz. April 11-14 at 8:30. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

NEWYORKERS
A satirical revue about life in Manhattan, by Glenn Slater (lyrics) and Stephen Weiner (music). Christopher Ashley is the director. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

NO NIGGERS, NO JEWS, NO DOGS
Primary Stages presents a new play by John Henry Redwood, about a black woman's friendship with a Jewish scholar in North Carolina in the forties. (354 W. 45th St. 333-4062.)

NOW THAT COMMUNISM IS DEAD, MY LIFE FEELS EMPTY
Richard Foreman's forty-eighth play has many of the whacked-out elements audiences have come to expect from the father of downtown theatre, but it doesn't have anything new, really. Foreman's plays used to be enigmatic, exhilarating blows to the brain. With this latest work, the formula has got so comfortable that it seems like shtick. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
From Chicago, a Steppenwolf Theatre revival of Dale Wasserman's adaptation of the 1962 Ken Kesey novel, starring Gary Sinise. Terry Kinney is the director. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

PASSION PLAY
Peter Nichols' 1981 dark comedy, about a couple destroyed by an affair. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

PEARL THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting Jean-François Regnard's 1708 comedy, "A Will of His Own," in a new translation by Michael Feingold. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY
A stage adaptation by Joe O'Byrne of Oscar Wilde's novel. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY
In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby: the ravages of adulthood, the tidal wave of troubles and injuries that come with time. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic performances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

REFERENCES TO SALVADOR DALI MAKE ME HOT
Rosie Perez portrays a lonely army wife whose husband suffers from Gulf War syndrome, in a new play by José Rivera. (Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes April 22.)

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Rather than a revival of Richard O'Brien's 1973 musical, a glam tribute to fifties horror flicks, Christopher Ashley's production is an unsexy and oddly earnest homage to the 1975 cult-movie adaptation. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
Lily Tomlin is back on Broadway in the one-woman, thirteen-character show written for her by her longtime collaborator, Jane Wagner, and what's not to love about that? Tomlin is terrific—moving, funny, and as lithe and vibrant as she was when she first performed the show here, fifteen years ago. This is a chance to see a remarkable life force in action. (11/27/00) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SERVICEMEN
From the New Group, a drama by Evan Smith, about a socialite and a playboy who frequent the hangouts of departing enlisted men in New York during the Second World War. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

SEUSSICAL
For all the whimsy of Theodor Geisel's doggerel, what's missing in this relentlessly cute musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty is mayhem and magic. With the exception of one gentle and winning performance—by Kevin Chamberlin as Horton the Elephant, who gets conned into hatching an egg—it's a show with curiously little charm. (12/25/00 & 1/1/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

A SKULL IN CONNEMARA
The middle play in Martin McDonagh's Leenane trilogy (which includes "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" and "The Lonesome West," both previously seen in New York). Like the others, it is permeated by violence, decay, death, and humor—humor that, in this case, is predominantly of the patronizing, stage-Irish variety and saturated in alcohol. Gordon Edelstein directed. (3/5/01) (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS
In Marie Jones's comedy, set in an Irish village during the filming of a big Hollywood movie, Seán Campion and Conleth Hill portray all the characters. Ian McElhinney is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
As Marjorie Taub, an Upper West Side culture vulture on the verge of a nervous breakdown, the dexterous Linda Lavin makes Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst dazzle. In her pretentiousness, however, she is a gaudy incarnation of the boulevard's contempt for ideas. In this piece of slick flimflam, there is attitude but no character, laughter but no insight, action but no plot, suffering but no pain. What we have here, in other words, is a Broadway hit. (3/20/00) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

TAMBURLAINE
The Target Margin Theatre continues its Christopher Marlowe season with the playwright's 1587 ten-acter, presented in two acts a night. (Theatorium, 198 Stanton St. For more information, call 358-3657.)

TEN UNKNOWNS
In Jon Robin Baitz's cunning and elegant play, Donald Sutherland portrays Malcom Raphelson, a hard-drinking seventy-two-year-old figurative painter, who has been holed up in retreat from the art world for twenty-eight years, and Justin Kirk his shaggy, mordant assistant. Sutherland's blocked artist, suddenly faced with the prospect of a retrospective and looming fame, raises fascinating issues about symbiosis and envy. Thanks to the marvellous cast (which includes Julianna Margulies and Denis O'Hare), the unassuming authority of Daniel Sullivan's direction, and Baitz's own deft storytelling, the audience is conned into sympathizing with Raphelson the same way that the envious trick themselves into not seeing their own vicious feelings. (3/19/01) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes April 15.)

UP AGAINST THE WIND
New York Theatre Workshop presents a rap-poetry play about the life of Tupac Shakur, written by Michael Develle Winn. (79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

ROBERT RISKO

The soulful vocalist Angie Stone lights up S.O.B.'s. (see Night Life—Clubs).

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

THE DINNER PARTY
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

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TABLES FOR TWO

ATLAS

40 Central Park S. (759-9191)—It is de rigueur these days for every aspiring young chef to announce himself before the appetizer with an amuse-bouche, a gatekeeper to the culinary realm into which he is about to take you. On a recent night at Atlas, a snug, wood-panelled establishment that has all the charm of a first-class-passenger lounge, the starter was a thimbleful of what can only be described as essence of sea foam. An initial sip was inviting enough: the frothy brine was warmed and sweetened by cream and . . . was it vanilla? But then something solid struck the palate, introducing a wholly unexpected element—a chunk of what tasted like smoked eel. "The fire down below, I guess," one diner quipped, trying to decide whether he had enjoyed what he had just inadvertently swallowed. The remark probably would have delighted the much discussed chef Paul Liebrandt, whose concoctions seem designed less to feed the soul than to stimulate conversation.

Consider the first courses: poached oysters in apple cider with foie gras, cornichon purée, and almond froth; mackerel tartare with black-olive jelly and smoked-bacon sorbet. Among the main courses are squab with cauliflower, mango, and bitter chocolate; yellowtail with cannelloni of bacon and rhubarb in a tarragon sauce; and cod larded with eel in a coconut-curry sauce. In fact, most of Liebrandt's food is more titillating to the imagination than to the tongue: he combines his seemingly dissonant flavors with such subtlety that the results are surprisingly bland. (The most memorable thing about his use of bitter chocolate is the way he drizzles it across the china, Morris Louis-style.) There is a splendid selection of cheeses (including a great Cropwell Bishop Stilton) and an eye-catching assortment of desserts in which the relentless whimsy finally becomes genuinely satisfying—notably, a chilled rhubarb soup with goat's-milk-yogurt sorbet, white chocolate, and pistachios and a milk-chocolate panna cotta in a tamarind sauce, sprinkled with fleur de sel. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner only. Prix-fixe $68.)

—*Charles Michener*

THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.

THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

ELIOT FELD/BALLET TECH
The company, one of the co-founders of the Joyce Theatre, returns for its spring season, performing eighteen repertory works in five weeks, with guest appearances by Damian Woetzel, Donlin Foreman, and Buffy Miller. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. April 10-13 at 8, April 14 at 2 and 8, and April 15 at 2. Through April 22.)

"TRANSPORTED"
The choreographer Rae Ballard, a onetime member of the Anna Sokolow Players' Project, presents a full-length work based on the Holocaust diaries of Etty Hillesum. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. April 12-14 at 8.)

"BELIEVE"
The choreographer Mollie O'Brien presents the première of the title work, a trio performed by Jennifer Dignan, Gina Jacobs, and O'Brien. The program closes with "Cut Outs," a work about female identity, and "Touch," a solo choreographed for O'Brien by Jean Vitrano. (Williamsburg Arts Nexus, 205 N. 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-599-7997. April 12-14 at 8.)

"FLAMENCO BLUE IMPRESSIONS"
The Andalusian dancer Olympia Estrella and a troupe of contemporary dancers from Seville perform flamenco steps to blues, jazz, and traditional Spanish music. (42nd Street Theatre, 348 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. April 10-14 at 8 and April 15 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

"LOSER'S LOUNGE"
The career of Harry Nilsson, the silver-throated pop singer, underrated songwriter, and running buddy of John Lennon's who died in 1994, is a natural for review by Joe McGinty and the Loser's crew. Nilsson was prolific, he worked in a multitude of styles, and he built humor and good cheer into even his most melancholy compositions. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. April 12-13 at 8 and April 14 at 8.)

"MILES AGAIN"
The **Carnegie Hall Jazz Band**, led by the trumpeter **Jon Faddis**, presents a tribute to Miles Davis. Special guests include the trumpeter **Wallace Roney**, who has built himself something of a second career as a stand-in for the great man at these affairs, and the young vocalist of the moment **Jane Monheit.** (247-7800. April 12 at 8.)

LEROY THOMAS AND THE ZYDECO ROADRUNNERS
Thomas is a thirty-four-year-old bandleader who started out in his father's zydeco group when he was a child. Along the way, he's honed his skill on the single-note accordion as well as the larger, piano-note accordion. Thomas has also maintained a healthy sense of humor, and when he breaks into the title track on his recent CD, "Monkey & the Baboon" ("Well the monkey and the baboon playing in the grass / Monkey told the baboon you kiss too fast / Baboon say no this cannot be / And the monkey say, baby, you're killing me"), even the most stressed-out New Yorkers will be in the mood to party. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. For information about dance lessons, which are provided at the show, call 685-7597. April 15 at 7:30.)

FRANK LACY
Anyone who has witnessed this trombonist tearing up the bandstand with McCoy Tyner, Steve Turre, and other jazz notables can have little doubt that the rambunctious musician will turn on the heat with his own band, the fourteen-piece Vibe Tribe. Lacy is here Mondays in April. (Jazz Gallery, 290 Hudson St., near Spring St. 242-1063. April 16 at 9 and 10:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—April 11-12: The Western swing of **Asleep at the Wheel.** April 13-14: The Buena Vista Social Club veteran **Eliades Ochoa.** April 17: More renowned for album sleeves adorned with axe-wielding barbarians (courtesy of celebrated fantasy artist Frank Frazetta) than for their music, the hirsute Southern-rock/metal pioneers **Molly Hatchet** continue flirtin' with disaster.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—April 14: **David Johansen and the Harry Smiths.** Entering the fourth phase of an endearingly eccentric career (after periods as a proto-punk forefather in the New York Dolls and as a middle-of-the-road solo artist, as well as a lucrative stint as the lounge entertainer Buster Poindexter), the New York native Johansen abandons showy artifice for a sincere homage to American blues, country, and folk music.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—April 12: **BS2000,** an offshoot of the Beastie Boys consistng of Adam (Adrock) Horowitz and the band's erstwhile touring drummer Amery (Awol) Smith. The two practice a decidedly kitschy blend of keyboard-driven pop augmented by a low-rent drum machine and purposely cheesy vocal effects. While this show will be attended by droves of the Beasties' faithful, the real question is how well this musical in-joke will translate to the stage. April 13: **Rocket from the Crypt,** a six-piece San Diego ensemble complete with sparkling horns and matching greasers-from-hell rockabilly outfits, comes on like a glittery Vegas floor show. Despite their tongue-in-cheek sheen, they deliver a powerful punch with a bonus dose of vintage R. & B. panache.

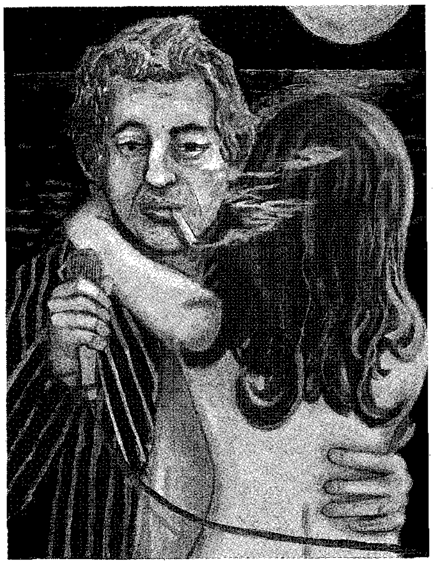
CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S.
73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—April 13-14: **Son Seals.** One of the leading figures of post-sixties blues, this son of an Arkansas juke-joint operator plays in the slashing, urgent style of his mentor, Albert King.

THE COOLER
416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—April 13: **Congo Norvell** leads a tribute to Serge Gainsbourg. The slightly seedy, naughty-minded Frenchman is fêted by a fittingly smoky and sultry noirish combo in an appropriately dim downtown venue. Gainsbourg's breathy, erotic paeans to the outlaw life style should sound right at home here.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—April 12: **Chicks on Speed.** Art rock at its creative best or self-indulgent worst, depending on your tolerance for ironic manipulation. Dryly spoken lyrics and foreign-language samples clash with occasionally melodic guitars and danceable New Wave beats on "The Re-releases of the Unreleases," the latest Stateside release by this German trio of former art students.

LIVING ROOM
84 Stanton St. (533-7237)—April 15: **M. Paul Curreri** and **devon,** who are on leave from the fertile Charlottesville, Virginia, folk-music scene. Curreri, a young singer-songwriter who blends his impressive facility for blues guitar and piano with an exceptional songwriting ability, brings a renewed eloquence to the medium. Touring to support her forthcoming release, "Long Sleeve Story," produced by Stefan Lessard of the Dave Matthews Band, the eighteen-year-old devon has noteworthy guitar chops and an undeniably soulful vocal sensibility.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Such recent neo-soul stars as Lauren Hill, Erykah Badu, and D'Angelo have seen their careers blossom in a row tilled by **Angie Stone** (here April 12). In the early nineties, the Columbia, South Carolina, native founded the critically acclaimed trio Vertical Hold and co-wrote a number of tracks on D'Angelo's début album, "Brown Sugar," and on his follow-up disk, "Voodoo." D'Angelo returned the favor by helping with a song on Stone's 1999 solo début, "Black Diamond," which is lush with Stone's deep, soulful alto. Last year Stone was swept away from Arista Records when Clive Davis started his new label, J Records, and she's back in the studio working on a forthcoming album. Dining.



The music of Serge Gainsbourg is celebrated at the Cooler.

GIBB SLIFE

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—April 11: New Jersey's ferocious **Monster Magnet**—all local boys made good—are finally getting a taste of the limelight now that stoner rock (à la vintage Black Sabbath) is marginally back in vogue. Faced with amplifiers set on "Stun" and band members with tongues firmly in cheek, curious road warriors should dress accordingly and bring earplugs, because the Magnet is certain to leave this tiny venue in smoking ruins.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—April 13: The **Howard Fishman** quartet. Led by the guitarist and singer Fishman, a Connecticut native who spent his musically formative years in New Orleans, this quartet has played such diverse locales as the Oak Room, Sardi's, the Mercury Lounge, and Pete's Candy Store, a neighborhood bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (where it has a long-running regular Thursday-night engagement). As might be expected from such an eclectic résumé, Fishman defies easy characterization. He and his violinist, Russell Farhang, call to mind Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli, and the group, which is rounded out by a bassist and a trumpeter, produces the freshest small-group swing in the city. But their music is much more complex. The band's latest CD, "I Like You a Lot," is an affecting and haunting collection of cunning originals which shows flashes of folk, blues, and even tango.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through April 15: The trumpeter **Maynard Ferguson** and **Big Bop Nouveau.** See Maynard trot out his umpteenth band. Hear him hit notes best appreciated by Labradors. Watch as he pulls in tourists. Give him points for consistency, though—he knows what they want, and he gives it to them every time.

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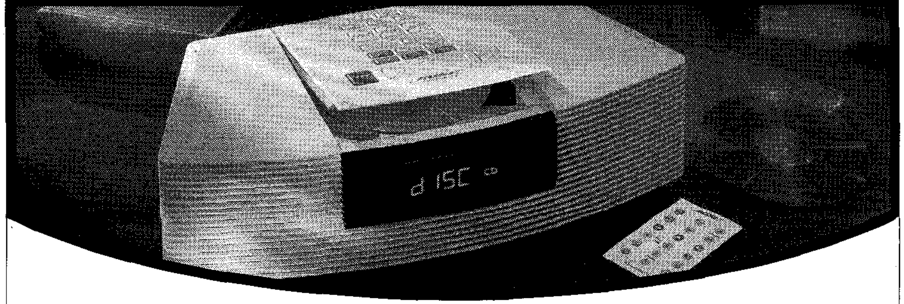

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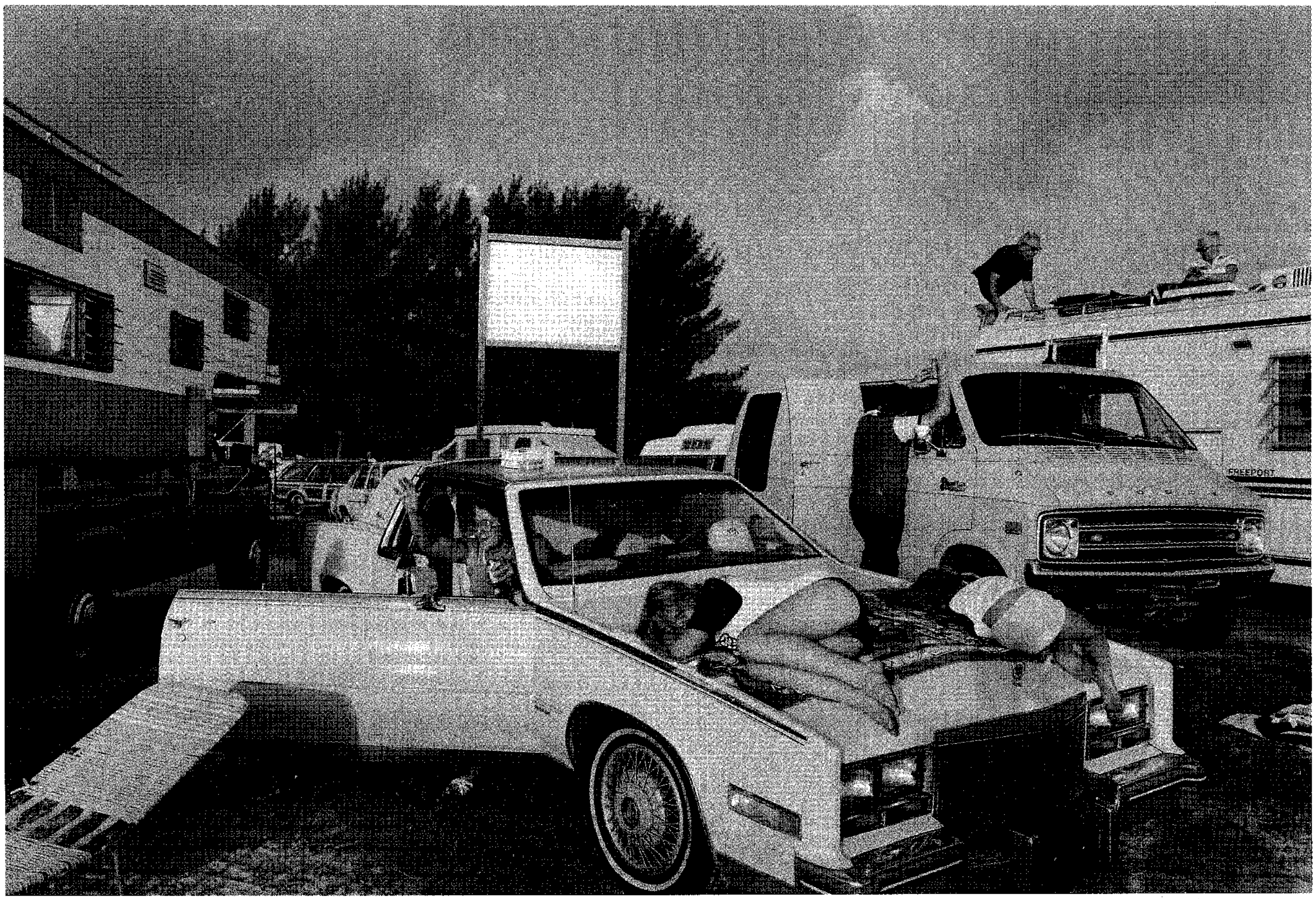
CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through June 23, **Bobby Short.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Barbara Carroll** presides at the piano through June 23.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Through May 5: The **John Pizzarelli** trio, with special guests **Bucky Pizzarelli** and the vocalist **Jessica Molaskey.** John is an exceedingly talented singer, guitarist, and bandleader; his father, Bucky, is the acknowledged master of the seven-string guitar, an instrument he has played alongside such artists as Benny Goodman and Stéphane Grappelli. As a guest with John's trio (which also includes another son, **Martin,** on bass) Pizzarelli *père* will display his matchless artistry. Father, sons, trio pianist **Ray Kennedy,** and Molaskey (who is also John's wife) all love the great Tin Pan Alley repertoire, and even without a drummer in sight this clan will have no problem heating up the club.



Mitch Epstein's photographs of American recreational life from the nineteen-seventies through the present, at Sikkema.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—You can almost hear the grass on the savanna rustle when **Abdullah Ibrahim** (here with his trio through April 15) stirs up a lolling South African piano vamp and his bassist and drummer lock together to expertly ride the undulating rhythms. Mondays in April belong to the **Howard Fishman** quartet (see BAM Café). Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—April 13-14: Funky fusion will be part of the mission when **Mike Clark,** the former drummer for Herbie Hancock's Headhunters, brings in his own Elite Forces band, here manned by the guitarist **Charlie Hunter,** a leading advocate of neo-jazz funk, and the saxophonist **Joe Lovano,** who has yet to confront a musical situation he can't fit into. April 15: **Ballin' the Jack** explores the rough-and-tumble exoticism of Duke Ellington's "jungle music" of the nineteen-thirties.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—April 12: **Derek Bailey,** the poet of guitar noise, whose intense, probing style has made him the international spokesman for spontaneous, nonlinear improvisation, offers a solo show. April 14: Bailey shares the stage with the like-minded drummer **Susie Ibarra,** a veteran of the rhythmic contusions of David S. Ware's quartet.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through April 15: The **Chucho Valdés** quartet. If anyone can restore relations between Cuba and the U.S., it's pianist Valdés. Hear him live once at a New York jazz club and you'll do anything you can to make sure he's permitted to return on a regular basis. Pianists are warned, though: Valdés, a terrifying composite of Art Tatum, Cecil Taylor, Bill Evans, and countless less familiar, Cuban virtuosos, is also capable of making you wish you had never been born. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—The British Romantic William Blake (1757-1827) is best known as a poet, but his gifts as a visual artist were prodigious as well. Apprenticed to an engraver by the age of fifteen, he went on to develop an innovative printing technique (which he claimed came to him in a vision) that enabled him to self-publish such illuminated texts as "Songs of Innocence and Experience." The copper-etching plates and pages from the book cover one long wall of an extensive show that includes more than a hundred and seventy-five works. Through June 24. ♦ **"The Treasury of the Basel Cathedral"** features seventy-five objects, most from the eleventh through the sixteenth centuries—the emphasis is on jewel-encrusted gold and silver, but there are also assorted textiles, prayer books, and a handsome pair of embellished doors with ironwork as fine as filigree. Through May 27. ♦ With fifteen paintings by Vermeer (and possibly a sixteenth, "Young Woman Seated at a Virginal," which has his luminously impersonal touch), five by the tragically short-lived Fabritius, who may have been his teacher, and ten by his great rival De Hooch, **"Vermeer and the Delft School"** offers an encyclopedic look at the milieu that formed the calmest genius of the seventeenth century. This is the Met at its best: a stately procession of masterpieces, accompanied by informative, sometimes tart commentary. Through May 27. ♦ **"Correggio and Parmigianino: Master Draftsmen of the Renaissance."** Through May 6. ♦ **"Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting."** Through Aug. 19. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Van Gogh's Postman: The Portraits of Joseph Roulin"** is a refreshing antidote to blockbuster fever. This small show (five paintings and two drawings) reunites all but one of the portraits Van Gogh (1853-90) made of his friend and neighbor Joseph Roulin. Painted between the summer of 1888 (the infamous year of the ear) and the spring of 1889 (the year before the artist's death), the pictures grow increasingly stylized, culminating in the harmonious turbulence of the one portrait here which is part of MOMA's own collection. Van Gogh wrote that the postman "has a head like Socrates, interesting to paint," and after an initial three-quarter-length portrait of Roulin, a somewhat awkward sitter, he focussed on a head-and-shoulders format. The background evolves from robin's-egg blue to mustard yellow to a floral wallpaper as the postman's beard shifts from naturalistic blonds and browns to a roil of aquatic blues and greens worthy of a Hokusai wave. Through May 15. ♦ A retrospective exhibition of the radiant, mural-size color photographs of Andreas Gursky. Through

SINCE GEORGE W. BUSH TOOK OFFICE,
THERE'S BEEN NO CONCERN WHATSOEVER ABOUT THE Y2K BUG.

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May 15. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"The Global Guggenheim"** offers a selection of two hundred paintings and sculptures from the far-flung collection, normally housed in museum branches and partner institutions in Berlin, Bilbao, Venice, and St. Petersburg. Through April 22. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"BitStreams,"** the museum's survey of digitally enhanced art work, is an exercise in, and maybe a cure for, techno-optimism. The objects themselves—photographs, videos, digitally designed sculptures, and a generous sampling of sound works—are gimmicky and modest, especially compared to the infatuated descriptions in the wall texts that accompany them. There are exceptions: Paul Pfeiffer's celebrated Ptolemaic basketball video (a spinning ball at the center of a chaotic universe of players, hands, and hoops) looks as bewitching as ever. The show's most tantalizing and ambitious piece is John Klima's "ecosystm 2000," which purports to translate up to the minute economic and weather conditions into animated landscapes. The idea sounds fascinating; the reality (clumsy icons whooshing across a variably colored screen) is a test of patience, an exemplar of this early stage of digital creativity. Through June 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—It's hard to imagine a more eclectic exhibition than **"A Family Album: Brooklyn Collects,"** which culls art works from more than eighty lenders with ties to the borough. The premise may be a fund-raising ploy, but the result is anarchy of the finest calibre. Wandering from a Pontormo Madonna to a Balthus nymphet and from Chinese antiquities to central-Asian textiles, one feels happily bewildered by the diversity of aesthetic stimuli. At the same time, the show offers the gossipy pleasures of seeing who owns what. The porn magnate Robert Guccione has particularly fine canvases by Degas and Modigliani. The novelist Paul Auster owns a tiny Blakelock. From the abstract painter Terry Winters's collection there's a lovely Chris Ofili sketch featuring Afros. Almost nothing is worth ignoring, except the show's musical soundtrack: Lena Horne all day every day. Through July 1. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—Portions of the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana's huge collection of books and manuscripts, on display in the United States for the first time. Through April 28. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
583 Broadway (219-1222)—Paul McCarthy's primal work is notorious for its gross-out factor (Vaseline, ketchup, and mayo are used to nauseating effect) and taboo subjects (incest and bestiality, to name just two). Much of this retrospective is like castor oil—hard to stomach, but good for you. Through May 13. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

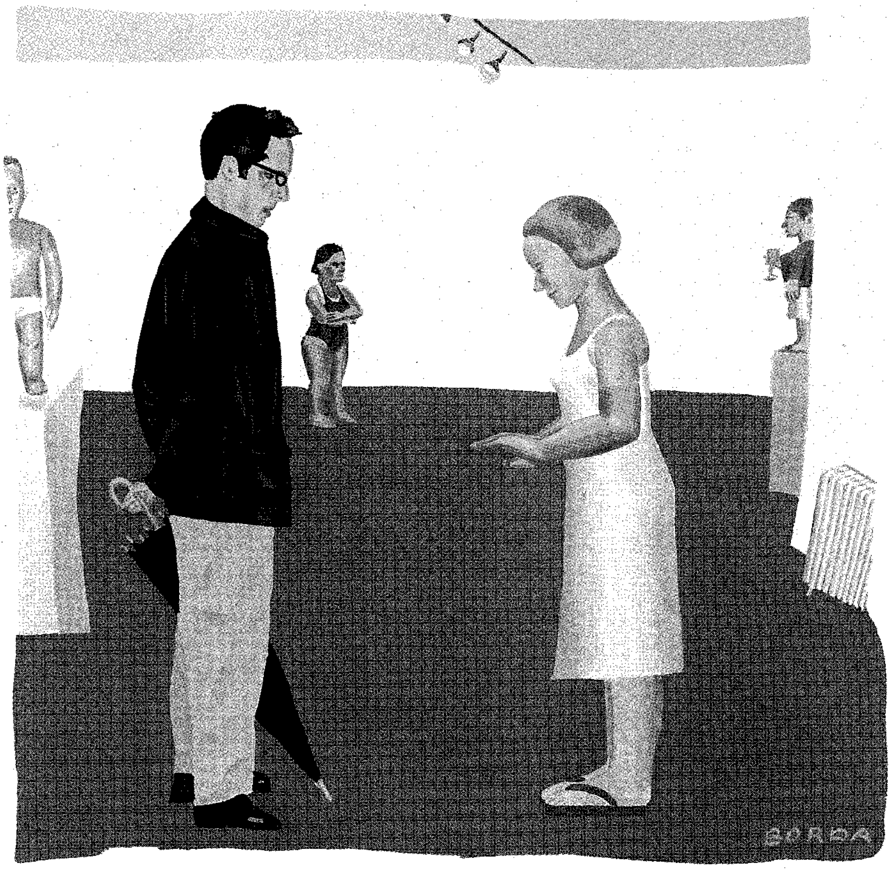
GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ROBERT MANGOLD
Minimalism does a pirouette in luminous paintings, variations on the deceptively simple theme of a curved line. The apparently monochrome canvases, which range from garnet red to daffodil yellow to faded-denim blue, are often the subtly prismatic result of two layers of differing hues. Each painting barely contains its spiralling, pencilled line, which flirts with the edge of the frame as if ready to break loose. It's as if the ellipses that grace the artist's previous work have split wide open from sheer joy. Through April 21. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

ALEXIS SMITH
Dumpster diving meets social critique in kitschy collages assembled from odds and ends (and the occasional musical instrument) salvaged by the artist from the streets of Los Angeles, where she lives. The show, collectively titled "An Embarrassment of Riches," pokes fun at American consumer culture, where more is never enough. In "Town and Country" (magazine references abound here), a folding table is emblazoned with fox-hunt scenery and a line from Emerson which could double as the show's subtitle: "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Through April 21. (Lawrence Rubin Greenburg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 445-0444.)

ALTOON SULTAN
Unsentimental but radiantly sunny, Sultan's Vermont farmscapes offer an update on the state of agriculture, with its heavy machinery and plastic-wrapped silage. Their picturesque crispness belongs more to documentary than to Photo-Realism—they're part of the sober tradition of Eakins and Sheeler. They also hint heavily at Sultan's fondness for abstraction: the giant blue chute of an Ag Bagger (the agribusiness equivalent of a Diaper Genie) registers as a surreptitious minimalist installation, like a big Judd basking in a sculpture park. Through April 21. (DeNagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)



Glass and wood sculptures of South Africans, by Claudette Schreuders, at Shainman.

JULIETTE BORDA

Short List

JEAN DUBUFFET
Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 988-1623.
Through April 28.

SUZAN FRECON
Markey, 42 E. 76th St. 517-9892.
Through April 28.

JIM PETERS
CDS, 76 E. 79th St. 772-9555.
Through May 19.

"SELF-MADE MEN"
DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.
Through May 5.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

JOHN HULL
Alert viewers might recognize, in a painting called "Picnic," a slim blond girl in pigtails: she's Fairfield Porter's daughter, lifted out of one of her father's portraits and transplanted into Hull's world of trailer-park sunshine, beer, and heavy American-made cars. And she seems oddly at home: Hull makes working-class loitering look companionable, despite the persistent intimations of violence. Like his shirtless male protagonists, Hull's pictures often go astray, but their deftly observed narratives are an art-world rarity. Through April 14. (Tatistcheff, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4547.)

SHANNON KENNEDY
With an unconcealed—but often ignored—video camera, Kennedy wandered through the voyeur's paradise that is the New York subway system. The resulting grainy, slow-motion procession of looming faces, elbows, ties, and T-shirts feels slight but absorbing, like the opening credits to a stalker flick. Through April 14. (Dee/Glasoe, 529 W. 20th St. 924-7545.)

PHILIP PEARLSTEIN
Pearlstein, a living Old Master of New York painting, demonstrates in a big, strong show why he is always esteemed and rarely loved. As usual, he paints naked models at very close quarters—a hip down here, an elbow over there—with almost forensic detachment. He tricks out his packed compositions with patterned rugs and spreads and insouciant-looking objects—carnival toys, an African drum—as if to symbolize a joy of living that his models (who are often asleep) hardly radiate. In one painting, we behold the hilly flesh of two young women through the wire cowling of a large electric fan. Pearlstein's work is imposingly handsome and not even remotely erotic. The nude, he writes, in a phrase that captures his singularly nonchalant and brutal pragmatism, is a subject "readily available in great variety." Through April 21. (Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.)

Short List

ELLEN GALLAGHER
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through April 14.

GARY HUME
Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.
Through April 21.

RAY JOHNSON
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through April 21.

MARIA MARSHALL
Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219.
Through April 14.

CLAUDETTE SCHREUDERS
Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701.
Through April 14.

JIM SHAW
Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100.
Through April 21.

TERRY WINTERS
Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through April 28. See also Downtown—Short List.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

TAKASHI MURAKAMI
Mycology meets Japanese *manga* in superflat paintings of cartoon toadstools cavorting on silver backgrounds. In the large, seven-panel centerpiece of the show, Murakami hints at a dark side to his happy, trippy world: clusters of small fungi quiver at the base of a massive mushroom with fanglike shards protruding from its gills. Through April 14. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 680-9889.)

Short List

PAUL LAFFOLEY
Kent, 67 Prince St. 966-4500. Through April 21.

TERRY WINTERS
Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.
Through April 28. See also Chelsea—Short List.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

HANS WINKLER / DANIEL ZELLER
The bright, basic world map Winkler has hung here, a self-described "Mercator Projection," dated 1993, includes a Universal Product Code just off the south coast of Australia, confirming, almost unnecessarily, the artist's interest in geography and cataloguing. His larger installation, "Arche 2001," takes on phone numbers, retrofitting a wooden rowboat from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to hold a pair of bookshelves stacked with directories from around the world. The collection specializes in port cities, and viewers are encouraged to look up friends. Next door, Zeller's intricate pencil drawings invent and map circuit-board-like surfaces. The lush and mysterious results, which look like interconnected storage tanks or anthills—or the artist's criss-crossing belly-button hairs—are ultimately too opaque. Through April 16. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

"SPRING EXPOSITION"
Within the last year, Joseph Silvestro has established a National Gallery of Brooklyn, National Press of Brooklyn, and National Charity Corporation of Brooklyn, all headquartered in this building. His first large show doesn't live up to the grandeur of those names, but it rounds up strong young painters—Jackie Gendel, Chie Fueki, Sabina Ott, and Patrick Armacost all deserve attention—and pairs established artists with those who work under their influence. A black-and-white Stuart Davis "Champion" appears with Joshua March's color replicate of it. Tom Friedman's minty-smelling toothpaste wall and missable life-size fly—which, at seventy-five grand, is the world's most expensive art work per square inch, according to Silvestro—are matched by Silvestro's exuberant hucksterism. Through April 22. (Silvestro, 122 N. 11th St. 718-782-9830.)

AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
April 11 at 10 A.M. and 2: The house concludes its three-day sale of fine jewelry. Among the items of note are several pieces from a collection given to Saint Louis University by Marion Rumsey Cartier, the daughter of Pierre Cartier; the selections include a cushion-cut diamond of nineteen carats, a Burmese ruby ring of five and a half carats, and a double-strand pearl necklace. Also featured in the sale are a number of pieces selected by Ronald Winston from the work of his father, Harry Winston. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
April 17 at 10 A.M.: Books; among the first editions are works by Beckett, Faulkner, Shirley Jackson, Ian Fleming, and E. M. Forster. ♦ April 17 at 2: An auction of silver. The featured items include a soup tureen and cover, possibly made by Nicolas Lecoufle in Paris, circa 1830. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

MITCH EPSTEIN
This small survey of Mitch Epstein's work includes pastoral studies of American recreation from the nineteen-seventies to the present, along with more recent images from his forthcoming book on New York. Epstein finds narrative in unexpected places—including a parking lot full of R.V.s and colorful American sedans—and in more familiar settings: on a river's edge, two scruffy adolescent boys recline gracefully, smoking cigarettes down to the filter. Through April 28. (Sikkema, 504 W. 22nd St. 646-336-5353.)

DAVID VESTAL
Vestal's rainy-day photographs revel in the impressionistic play of light on wet streets, but their sympathies lie with the drenched pedestrians. In a 1950 photograph of Nassau Street, Vestal moved away from the crowded sidewalks and stood alone in the street to record a band of white sky reflected on the wet pavement. These images are complemented by a series taken from inside a car and benevolent views of umbrella-bearing figures passing below his Twenty-second Street window. Through April 28. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600.)

JOHN YANG
The Stevenson Gallery specializes in unusual photographic processes, but Yang isn't here because his work is a novelty—it's just good. It was his subject matter that qualified him: enamelled portrait photographs from early-twentieth-century gravestones in Mount Zion Cemetery, in Queens. His black-and-white prints reveal every crack and chip on the medallions that were to bestow immortality on their subjects, and, in many cases, show so much fading that only the retouching done at the time the images were made—which created sweeping hair, wide eyes, Cupid's-bow lips—remains visible on the bleached surface. An eight-foot-long panorama suggests that the cemetery and its surroundings, once pastorally suburban, are similarly changed. Through April 21. (Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St. 352-0070.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
With "Telling Tales," Kiki Smith returns to the mythologies of earliest childhood via photography, sculpture, and video. "Gang of Girls," a series of thirteen photographed drawings of Little Red Riding Hood, is displayed in a darkened room with a roughly drawn and animated video of a big, bad "NightWolf" walking menacingly by—stepping into the installation is like entering a dark area of the psyche, full of old fears. The unconfident drawings evoke preteen marginalia, the kind of doodles done in spiral notebooks. Their fragility and naïeveté are an exciting departure for Smith, who can be heavy-handed in her depictions of the female body as a sexual battleground. ♦ Hans Bellmer's ever-reassembled dolls and a collection of Victorian daguerreotype portraits of male friends—some of whom look to modern eyes like couples—are also on show. All shows at the Center's Midtown space through June 10. ♦ A survey of Mary Ellen Mark's work is on show in the Uptown galleries through June 16. (Uptown: 1130 Fifth Ave., at 93rd St. Midtown: 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

WOLS
Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 749-4444. Through April 21.

"CONSTRUCTION/DESTRUCTION"
DeLellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.
Through May 12.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Verdi's **"Un Ballo in Maschera,"** with Michele Crider, Youngok Shin, Barbara Dever, Franco Farina, and Juan Pons; Plácido Domingo conducts. (April 11 and April 14 at 8.) ♦ Berg's **"Lulu,"** with Christine Schäfer, Hanna Schwarz, David Kuebler, and James Courtney; James Levine. (April 12 at 8 and April 16 at 7:30.) ♦ The final performance this season of **"Parsifal,"** with Violeta Urmana, Plácido Domingo, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, and John Tomlinson; James Levine. (April 13 at 6:30.) ♦ Elijah Moshinsky's production of Strauss's **"Ariadne auf Naxos"** returns with Deborah Voigt, in the title role, along with Natalie Dessay, Susanne Mentzer, Richard Margison, Graham Clark, Wolfgang Brendel, and the legendary Viennese tenor Waldemar Kmentt in his Met début, as the Major-Domo; James Levine. (April 14 at 1:30 and April 17 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The soprano Elizabeth Futral sings the title role in Douglas Moore's tragic folk opera, **"The Ballad of Baby Doe,"** a part that helped make Beverly Sills a star. One of the best American operas of the last century, it is a breezy, sentimental, yet dramatically adept work set against the background of the Colorado silver-mining craze of the eighteen-eighties; Moore's style combines elements of Puccini, d'Indy, and Tin Pan Alley. The new production is by Colin Graham. With Mark Delavan as the silver magnate Horace Tabor (Baby Doe's lover) and Joyce Castle as Tabor's dour wife, Augusta; George Manahan conducts. (April 12 at 7:30, April 14 at 1:30, and April 17 at 7:30.) ♦ A revival of Harold Prince's production of **"Don Giovanni,"** with Sally Wolf, Oksana Krovytska, Mariateresa Magisano, David Pittsinger, Matthew Polenzani, Kevin Langan, Valerian Ruminski, and John Marcus Bindel; Steuart Bedford. (April 13 at 8.) ♦ In his new production of **"La Bohème,"** the director James Robinson gets all the little things right: we may never quite buy his updating of the work to the beginning of the First World War, but he certainly knows how to move people around a stage. With Elizabeth Blancke-Biggs, Shelley Jameson, Gerard Powers, and Michael Corvino; Gerald Steichen. (April 14 at 8.) ♦ Frank Corsaro's production of Korngold's **"Die Tote Stadt"** returns to the stage, with Lauren Flanigan, John Horton Murray, and Charles Robert Stephens; George Manahan. (April 15 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

HENRY STREET CHAMBER OPERA
Mozart's early opera **"Il Sogno di Scipione"** has a serene setting—a Roman general dreams of encountering his forebears and a pair of goddesses in heaven—but the boy genius indulged himself in bravura vocal writing that the older Mozart, a consummate man of the theatre, would never have dared. Christopher Alden stages a modern production with young American singers, conducted by Neal Goren; the venue is the intimate Harry de Jur Playhouse, a nineteenth-century jewel. These are the final performances. (466 Grand Street. 279-4200. April 13 at 8 and April 15 at 6:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Kurt Masur conducts a grab-bag program of works by Shostakovich (the lighthearted Piano Concerto No. 2, with Helen Huang), Kodály (the "Peacock" Variations and the "Háry János" Suite), and Stephen Paulus, one of the leading choral composers of our time (the première of "Voices of Light," with the Westminster Symphonic Choir). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. April 12 at 8, April 13 at 11 A.M., April 14 at 8, and April 17 at 7:30.) ♦ The orchestra presents the two Kodály works, with the addition of Smetana's Piano Trio (played by the violinist Marc Ginsburg, the cellist Eric Bartlett, and the pianist Susan Walters). (Avery Fisher Hall. April 14 at 2.)

ST. MATTHEW PASSION
Jonathan Miller's 1997 staging of Bach's sacred masterpiece, which uses an informal setting and casual dress to suggest an early Christian service, returns to the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The singers include Phyllis Pancella, Daniel Taylor, Paul Agnew (as the Evangelist), Richard Clement, Andrew Schroeder (as Jesus), and Stephen Varcoe; Paul Goodwin conducts the New York Collegium. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. April 11 and April 13-14 at 7:30.)

NATIONAL CHORALE
Martin Josman conducts Mozart's Requiem, the "Coronation" Mass, and the "Ave Verum Corpus." (Avery Fisher Hall. 333-5333. April 13 at 8.)

POMERIUM
Alexander Blachly's thirteen-voice Renaissance chorus sings a collection of motets associated with Holy Week by Byrd, Du Fay, Lassus, and Gesualdo, among others. (The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 650-2290. April 14 at 1 and 3.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
One of Jens Nygaard's more fanciful programs, which includes music by Pachelbel (yes, *that* piece), d'Indy (the Triple Concerto for Flute, Cello, and Piano), Deems Taylor ("Portrait of a Lady"), and a Stephen Foster medley. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. April 16 at 2 and 7 and April 17 at 8.)

CONCORDIA ORCHESTRA
Members of the ensemble, conducted by Marin Alsop, present an all-French program of music by Debussy, Dukas, Ravel ("Chansons Madécasses"), Delage, and Milhaud ("The Creation of the World"). (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. April 17 at 6:30.)

RECITALS

ABBEY SIMON
The pianist presents his annual Carnegie Hall recital, a program of music by Beethoven, Schumann ("Kreisleriana"), Prokofiev, and Chopin (two mazurkas and the Scherzo No. 4). (247-7800. April 11 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
The sisters McDermott (the pianist Anne-Marie, the violinist Kerry, and the cellist Maureen) join the violinist Christian Bor and the violist Paul Neubauer for a pair of programs. April 12-13 at 7:30: Ravel's Violin Sonata, Dvořák's Piano Quintet, and Cécile Chaminade's Piano Trio in G Minor. ♦ April 14 at 7:30 and April 15 at 4: Music by Prokofiev (the First Piano Sonata), Bartók, Moszkowski, and Schumann (the Piano Quintet). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
With the Society's crew of resident musicians taking most of April off, the stage at Alice Tully Hall has been left to younger players of great promise. The Brentano String Quartet, a polished ensemble with an intellectual bent, takes its turn this week; their program includes not only masterworks by Haydn, Mozart (the "Dissonant" Quartet), and Stravinsky but also Charles Wuorinen's Fourth Quartet, which the group premièred. (875-5788. April 18 at 8.)

ALAN FEINBERG / ROBERT TAUB
Two New York pianists, known for their mastery of new music, turn their gaze on composers from the past. Feinberg, whose playing springs from an explosive mixture of intellectual and physical energy, explores the contrapuntal severity of Bach (including the "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue") but does not forget the present (he also plays music by the mystical Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaya, Shostakovich's greatest pupil and intimate friend). (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. April 12 at 8.) ♦ Taub, the first artist-in-residence at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study since T. S. Eliot, continues his multiyear traversal of the Beethoven piano sonatas with the first of three programs at Merkin Concert Hall. The concert of four sonatas (including the "Moonlight") will be preceded by a lecture and followed by a discussion with the audience. (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. April 17 at 8; the lecture is at 7:15.)

CATRIN FINCH
After Prince Charles heard Finch, a young Welsh harpist, play at his fiftieth-birthday party in 1999, he appointed her Royal Harpist, a post last filled during Queen Victoria's reign. (Finch's duties involve performing at princely functions approximately ten times a year; she is otherwise a student at the Royal Academy of Music in London.) The first-prize winner of the 2000 Young Concert Artists international auditions, she makes her New York début with a solo recital of music by Bach (a transcription of the "Italian Concerto"), Britten, Nino Rota, and others. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 307-6655. April 17 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

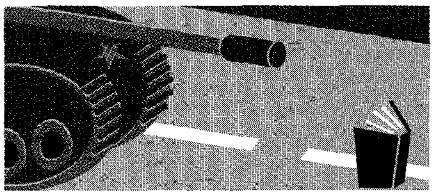
"NOTHING"
The author Oliver Sacks joins Roald Hoffman, a Nobel-laureate chemist, and K. C. Cole, a science writer whose latest book is "The Hole in the Universe," for an evening of readings and talks about "the concept of nothing, the void, the Buddhist idea of emptiness, in art, science, physics," according to the evening's organizer, the poet Angelo Verga. "It's a difficult thing to explain," he says. "It's such an intriguing idea that I'm just going to get out of their way and give them their space." (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St., between Bleecker and W. 4th Sts. 989-9319. April 16 at 6.)

MORE READINGS
April 11 at 8: A tribute to Stanley Kunitz, the U.S. Poet Laureate, features readings by Kunitz, Lucille Clifton, Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Sharon Olds, Robert Pinsky, and other poets. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. For more information, call 274-0343, ext. 10.) ♦ April 12 at 8: By Galway Kinnell, from his translations of works by François Villon and Rainer Maria Rilke. Charles Barrière and Silvia Beier will read the poems in the original French and German. (Deutsches Haus, Columbia University, 420 W. 116th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ April 16 at 7:30: By Christina Davis and Nicole Krauss, from their poetry. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ April 16 at 7:30: Tom Caruso directs a staged reading of one-act plays from the Winter 2000 issue of *Zoetrope* magazine, including "The Voice in the Desert," by George Makana Clark; "The Mystery at the Middle of Ordinary Life," by Don DeLillo; and "The Stolen Child," by Amanda Beesley. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. For more information, call 539-8851.)

MORE TALKS
April 13 at 6: David Levering Lewis talks about "W. E. B. DuBois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963," the recently published second volume of his biography of DuBois. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5488.) ♦ April 17 at 6: Wendy Lesser, the editor of *The Three Penny Review*, moderates a discussion about criticism and journalism with James Shapiro, a professor of English at Columbia University, and the *New Yorker* critics Joan Acocella and Louis Menand. (Graduate School of Journalism Lecture Hall, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Open Wounds



STEPHEN SAVAGE

The controversy over "The Tiananmen Papers," documents that ostensibly record the Chinese Communist Party's response to the student demonstrations in 1989 but which China's foreign minister has called "sheer fabrications," highlights a problem that is particularly acute for writers of Chinese history: who to believe? In **A MEMOIR OF MISFORTUNE** (Knopf), Su Xiaokang, a writer who was smuggled out of China in 1989, notes that although "the world would not accept the version offered by the Chinese leadership," it "could not come up with a version of its own." Su finds little solace in America; when his wife is paralyzed in an automobile accident, he questions both his role as a glamorous dissident and the meaning of the protests themselves.

Su also appears in Jasper Becker's **THE CHINESE** (Free Press) as the co-author of "River Elegy," a documentary that criticized Mao's glorification of the totalitarian Qin dynasty and incensed the government. Becker's broad survey of the last twenty years of reform stresses the ongoing relevance of ancient history to modern China. In 1989, for example, protesters in Beijing carried placards celebrating a scholar from the fourth century B.C.: "Qu Yuan! Your lament is not forgotten."

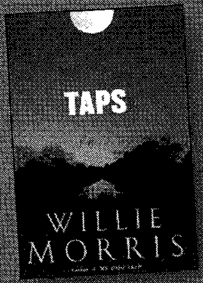
The heroine of Annie Wang's **LILI** (Pantheon) is part of "the wounded generation," Chinese who grew up during the Cultural Revolution. Lili initially views the protests in Tiananmen Square with an ironic detachment: "The pop singer says the media should be privatized. I wonder what I will use to get to sleep if there is no more *People's Daily*." But her distance dissolves when she starts volunteering as a nurse for the hunger strikers. She comes to see Beijing stripped, for once, of its history—"a nameless, timeless, ageless city. A city of revelation."

—*Nell Freudenberger*

CODA

The last novel from the literary legend, *Taps* captures all the comforting rhythms and charming eccentricities of life in Morris's native Mississippi.

TAPS
by Willie Morris
Pub. Price: $26.00
Our Price: $20.80
Readers' Advantage Price: $18.72


TAPS
WILLIE MORRIS

CONSOLATION

A young woman coming of age in the long shadow of World War II recalls lost love in a tale of war, romance and grief.

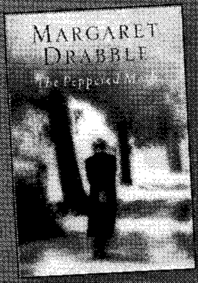
THE GARDENS OF KYOTO
by Kate Walbert
Pub. Price: $24.00
Our Price: $19.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.28

The Gardens of Kyoto

CATHARSIS

A young woman returns to the small Yorkshire town her grandmother escaped only to discover that the sensations of the past are never truly erased.

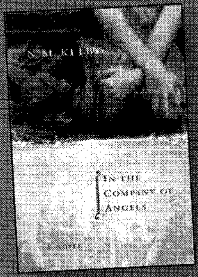
THE PEPPERED MOTH
by Margaret Drabble
Pub. Price: $25.00
Our Price: $20.00
Readers' Advantage Price: $18.00


MARGARET DRABBLE
The Peppered Moth

CHOCOLATE

A Jewish girl finds sanctuary from the Nazis in a Belgian convent. Miracles start happening soon after her arrival in a magical tale of angelic visitation.

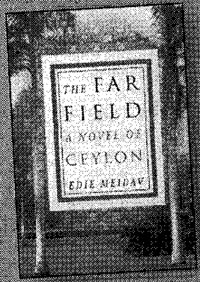
IN THE COMPANY OF ANGELS
by N. M. Kelby
Pub. Price: $21.00
Our Price: $16.80
Readers' Advantage Price: $15.12


N. M. KELBY
In the Company of Angels

COLONY

Henry Fyre Gould seeks spiritual utopia in 1936 Ceylon but discovers instead a tinderbox of caste struggle, espionage and suspicion.

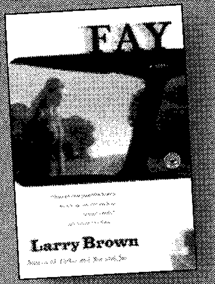
THE FAR FIELD
by Edie Meidav
Pub. Price: $25.00
Our Price: $20.00
Readers' Advantage Price: $18.00


THE FAR FIELD
A NOVEL OF CEYLON
EDIE MEIDAV

CYCLONE

A teenage Mississippi femme fatale flees an abusive father for the beaches of Biloxi, leaving bodies and intrigue in her wake.

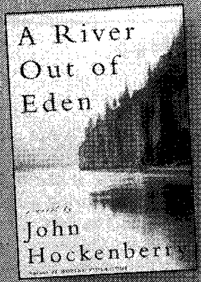
FAY
by Larry Brown
Pub. Price: $14.00
Our Price: $11.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $10.08


FAY
Larry Brown

CHINOOK

When workers at a Washington dam start turning up dead with native harpoons in their backs, suspicion falls on local descendents of the Chinook tribe.

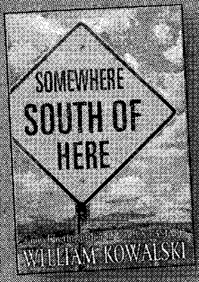
A RIVER OUT OF EDEN
by John Hockenberry
Pub. Price: $24.95
Our Price: $19.96
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.96


A River Out of Eden
John Hockenberry

COMMUNITY

Billy Mann travels to Santa Fe to find his mother and discovers the meaning of family and friends along the way. New from the author of *Eddie's Bastard*.

SOMEWHERE SOUTH OF HERE
by William Kowalski
Pub. Price: $25.00
Our Price: $20.00
Readers' Advantage Price: $18.00


SOMEWHERE SOUTH OF HERE
WILLIAM KOWALSKI

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MOVIES OPENING

BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 13.

CHOPPER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 11. (Film Forum.)

THE CIRCLE
A drama that threads together stories about the lives of women in contemporary Iran. Directed by Jafar Panahi. In Farsi. Opening April 13.

JOE DIRT
David Spade plays a janitor searching for the parents who abandoned him in this comedy directed by Dennie Gordon. With Christopher Walken and Dennis Miller. Opening April 11.

JOSIE AND THE PUSSYCATS
The story of the all-girl band that dresses up in catsuits is adapted for the big screen by Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan. With Tara Reid, Rachael Leigh Cook, Rosario Dawson, Parker Posey, and Alan Cumming. Opening April 11.

KINGDOM COME
A comedy about family squabbles which takes place during the funeral of the family patriarch. With Whoopi Goldberg, L.L. Cool J, and Jada Pinkett Smith. Opening April 11.

LAKEBOAT
Joe Mantegna directed a script by David Mamet about a group of men who work on a Great Lakes freighter. The ensemble cast includes Denis Leary, Tony Mamet, and George Wendt. Opening April 13. (The Screening Room.)

STATES OF CONTROL
A New York woman (Jennifer Van Dyck), bored with her marriage, decides to shake up her life with various tests of will, in this drama directed by Zack Winestine. Opening April 13. (Pioneer.)

FILM NOTES

AMORES PERROS
This three-part tale, the début directorial effort of Alejandro González Iñárritu, gives you a pretty good idea of what life is like in Mexico City and leaves you with an enduring wish never to drive its streets at rush hour. The first section chronicles the near-incestuous affair between Octavio (Gael García Bernal) and his sister-in-law Susana (Vanessa Bauche). The second, which sags with weary symbolism, is about a model who loses a leg. The third and strongest tells of an ex-terrorist and tramp (Emilio Echevarría) who kills for money and dreams of love. The connective tissue between these folks is a car crash, and each of them also either owns or trains dogs. (If your taste in movies doesn't run to pooches with bloody flanks and broken necks, you should probably stay away.) Iñárritu's style carries the day; it may be heated and hectic, but he doesn't bully you into judging these frazzled figures, and, in Echevarría, he has found a figure of great and grimy nobility. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/2/01.) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

BARTON FINK
In this 1991 Coen Brothers art thing, John Turturro plays Barton Fink, an idealistic New York dramatist who goes to Hollywood in 1941 hoping to use the studios' filthy lucre to bankroll his real work. But Fink can't lick his first assignment, and the only solution offered by his Faulknerian literary hero (John Mahoney) is the bottle. Odd and disgusting things start occurring in his seedy hotel, from wallpaper glue melting in the heat to inexplicable murder. If they're not happening in the cavernous emptiness between Fink's temples, they might as well be—they're as insubstantial and unpleasant as serial bad dreams. Is this an attack on creative solipsism, or an example of it? Ultimately, this movie isn't about the unsentimental education of a New York writer, or the crassness of American pop culture, or the agony of creative frustration. It's about showoff filmmakers reducing everything to grist for their undergraduate wit.—*Michael Sragow* (American Museum of the Moving Image; April 15.)

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS
John Garfield, Paul Henreid, Eleanor Parker, and seven other Warner Bros. stalwarts find themselves on a slow boat to eternity in this 1944 remake of "Outward Bound" (written by Daniel Fuchs, directed by Edward Blatt). Unlike the original play and movie, this version makes clear from the outset that the passengers are drifting toward their final reckoning. The picture is dead-on and lacking in suspense. Yet the earnest working-out of the metaphor gives the actors who play these souls a chance to bring big emotions to fruition. Edmund Gwenn is perfectly dry as the ship's steward; Sidney Greenstreet, as a heavenly judge, imposes his enormous, saturnine authority on the last act. And Erich Wolfgang Korngold's musical score envelops it all in a sweeping nostalgia.—*M.S.* (Museum of Modern Art; April 17.)

BLOW
This story of the real-life cocaine dealer George Jung—a Massachusetts man who sold the Medellín cartel's dope to mainstream America in the seventies—would seem to offer a perfect star vehicle for Johnny Depp, but the unconvincing narrative doesn't allow him to shape a performance. The director, Ted Demme, and the screenwriters, David McKenna and Nick Cassavetes, tell the story of George's rise as a series of semi-comic riffs on his unwittingness—how casually he operated, how oblivious he was to risk and treachery on all sides. Apart from one scary episode with Pablo Escobar, the scenes are flimsily staged—thin and underdone. Now and then Demme throws in the towel and resorts to a rapid montage of shots meant to convey the giddy drug life, but this isn't directing, and it isn't evocation, either; it's more like flinging a loosely pasted scrapbook onto the floor and asking the audience to sort it out.—*David Denby* (4/9/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Cinema I, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

DECEPTION
Blissfully foolish—a camp classic. Alex Hollenius (Claude Rains) is the greatest composer in the United States; his febrile mistress (Bette Davis) can escape him only by shooting him. Considering that he has set her up in the finest apartment in Manhattan, swaddled her in ermine, drenched her in champagne, and taught her to play the piano with a skill approximating that of Arthur Rubinstein, some might regard this as rank ingratitude. But Hollenius is a venomous genius, and he treats the cellist (Paul Henreid) whom she loves very shabbily—badgering him until he gets so nervous that he can hardly handle a bow. Irving Rapper, who had directed this trio in "Now, Voyager," let them run rampant this time, especially the leering Rains, who outdoes Davis in bravura. Erich Wolfgang Korngold did the music for this 1946 film, with Shura Cherkassky dubbing Davis's "Appassionata."—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of Modern Art; April 13.)

ENEMY AT THE GATES
During the siege of Stalingrad, two snipers—an innocent Red Army peasant from the Urals (Jude Law) and an aristocratic Nazi deer hunter (Ed Harris)—stalk each other in the mucky ruins. This elaborate duel might have been perversely interesting as a kind of military sick joke if the absurdity of it were the point. But the director Jean-Jacques Annaud and his long-time collaborator, the producer-writer Alain Godard, make it seem like the entire battle hinged on the struggle between the two specialists. Although the movie starts well, with horrifying epic scenes of the Red Army sacrificing thousands of men to stop the Germans, it rapidly loses all common sense and excitement.—*D.D.* (3/26/01) (Battery Park 16, Coronet Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

15 MINUTES
There's life and fun in this trashy pulse-of-the-city thriller, much of which is set in and around the media pits of Times Square. Two recent émigrés kick the madness into motion—a Czech psychopath (Karel Roden), who takes the promise of American freedom with alarming literalness, and a movie-loving Russian (Oleg Taktarov), who films his partner's crimes. These two violent screwballs are pursued by a celebrated police detective (Robert De Niro) and a young fire marshall (Edward Burns). Director John Herzfeld serves up fires, knifings, and shootouts, and manages, in the midst of the extreme mayhem, to hammer away at the American habit of turning criminals into media figures.—*D.D.* (3/26/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

THE GLEANERS AND I
The French filmmaker Agnès Varda, digital camera in hand, roams around her country recording the movements of gleaners. Traditionally, as in the archetypal Millet painting, gleaners were women who gathered the remains of the harvest; their modern counterparts are mostly scavengers, searching in dumpsters and other likely places. The French, of course, give the practice a wonderfully perverse twist—many gleaners do so by choice, disdainful of wastefulness and rampant consumerism. Varda's photographic eye is much in evidence, and her narration is both shrewd and whimsical. When she leaves a camera on accidentally, she uses the unintended footage to create a "dance of the lens cap," a filmic gleaning that acts as a perfect grace note. In French.—*Michael Agger* (Film Forum.)

HEARTBREAKERS
A comedy with a neat premise, but which is no more than occasionally funny. Max (Sigourney Weaver) and Page (Jennifer Love Hewitt) are a mother-daughter confidence team. Max lures men into marriage, and the libidinous Page leads them into adultery, which gives Max grounds for highly advantageous divorce settlements. Weaver, as willful as always, proves that at fifty-one she can play a femme fatale but not that she can do it with delight. She's been bizarrely matched up with Hewitt—all high round breasts and swivelling rear—who darts here and there and speaks in a soul-curdling snarl. The most depressing thing about the film is that its mediocrity may be intentional. "Go dumb" is the mantra of the moment, and so, in a genre that has always featured sophistication and wit, this grifter film features a statue with an erect penis.—*D.D.* (4/9/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Union Square, and Waverly.)

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
The latest film from the talented young Hong Kong writer-director Wong Kar Wai makes us pant for adultery. In the early sixties, in a community of Shanghai refugees living in Hong Kong, Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Mr. Chow (Tony Leung) are next-door neighbors in a friendly apartment building. The perfectly dressed and coiffed couple meet,

talk, and realize that their frequently travelling spouses are off having an affair with each other. What to do? The movie is all about sensual anticipation. Nat King Cole croons on the soundtrack, and the camera caresses the rain on the streets and the texture of a stone wall in the semi-darkness. So skillfully does the director bring us to a state of breathless expectation that when he refuses to deliver the goods he almost seems to have invented a new form of perversion. In Cantonese and French.—*D.D.* (2/5/01) (Murray Hill Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

LAST RESORT
A beautifully filmed, moody story about a young Russian mother (Dina Korzun) and son who arrive for a new life in London only to be shunted into a holding area in a seaside town. In this limbo, she is befriended by an Englishman (Paddy Considine), and they develop a tenuous affection for each other. The writer/director Pawel Pawlikowski vividly captures the makeshift society of asylum seekers, but his main achievement is the movie's emotional calculus—the drama builds from the principles of what we already know, and leads to an intensely bittersweet conclusion.—*M.A.* (Pioneer.)

MEMENTO
Guy Pearce ("L.A. Confidential") plays Leonard, a former insurance investigator who has mislaid his short-term memory; leave the room and come back ten minutes later, and he won't remember you. To help his case, and to solve the apparent murder of his wife, Leonard tattoos himself with memoranda and drives around the lowlier districts of L.A. County. At the same time, he has a couple of acquaintances (Carrie-Anne Moss and Joe Pantoliano) who seem eager both to support Leonard and to use his condition for their own unscrupulous ends. There is just a fine, despairing comedy to these events—not just in our fidgety hero, but in the constant thwarting of our need to know. The young British writer and director Christopher Nolan, who has every intention of putting us through the mill, doubles his fun by running the whole story backward. Damn him.—*A.L.* (3/19/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 19th Street East 6.)

THE MEXICAN
A shaggy-taco story—one of those south-of-the-border romps in which many people die in odd ways and the Mexicans are either gap-toothed cretins or unspeakably dignified grandees. Brad Pitt is Jerry, a small-time loser sent to Mexico by Los Angeles gangsters to retrieve a fabled handmade pistol; Julia Roberts is his girlfriend, Sam, who loves Jerry but is disgusted with him and flounces off to Las Vegas, where she's kidnapped by a sensitive gay hit man (James Gandolfini). Pitt and Roberts appear together only at the beginning and end of the movie and spend all their time engaging in the kind of noisy, shin-kicking squabble which must be fun to perform but does nothing for the audience.—*D.D.* (3/12/01) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

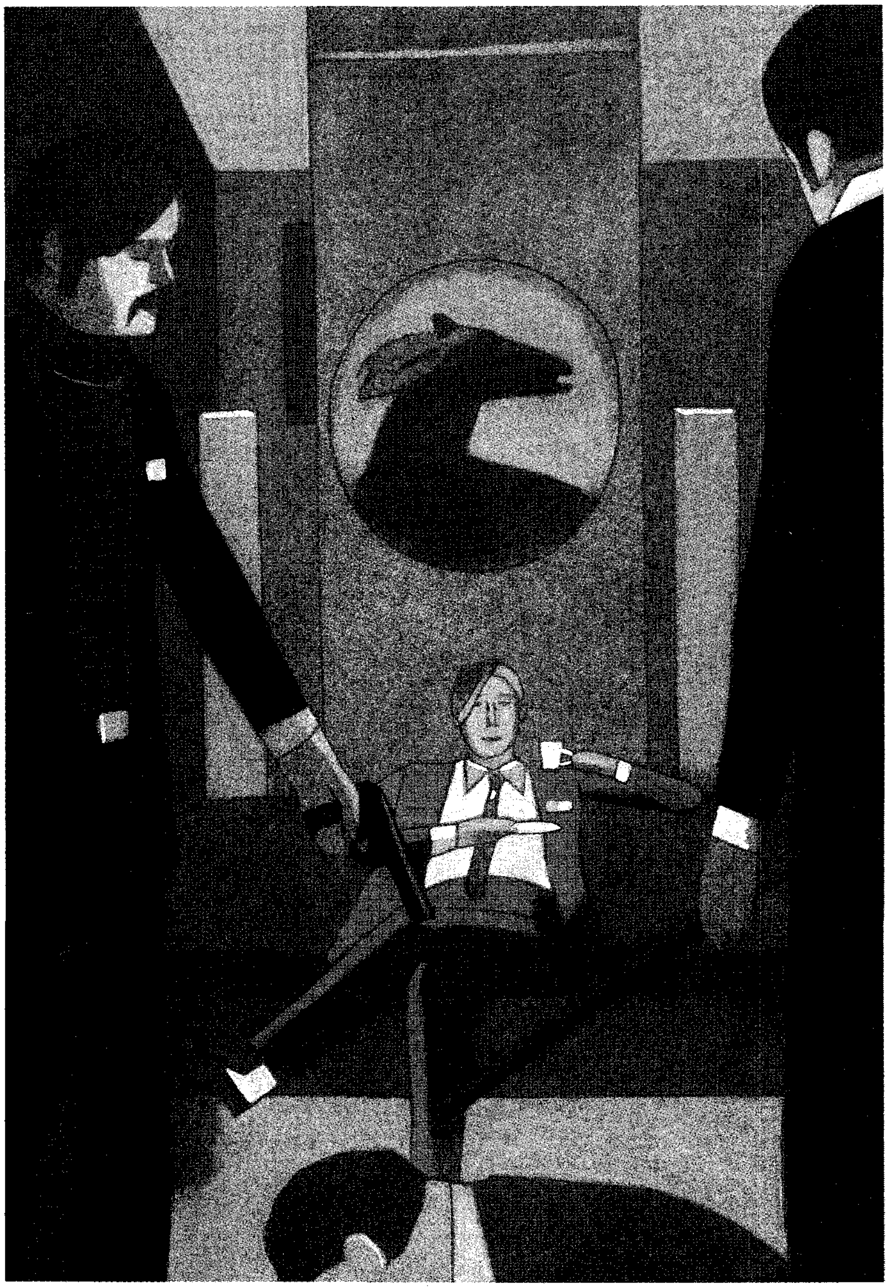
POLLOCK
A dogged march through the life and work of Jackson Pollock, starting in the early nineteen-forties, when Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) first approached him in Greenwich Village, continuing through their marriage and other tempests, and ending gloomily in a car wreck in 1956. The film was directed by Ed Harris, who also plays the artist. His face doesn't much resemble that of Pollock, but Harris has mastered the hunched amble and the glaring gaze. His best scenes are not the boozy rants but the quiet times with a cigarette and a brush—or, latterly, a dripping stick. Pollock's drinking was an interruption of his art, not a spur to it, and the film can do little to connect the two; we are left with a sombre study of discontent, enlivened by the appearance of Jennifer Connelly as the painter's final girlfriend. What she saw in him, by that stage, is anybody's guess.—*A.L.* (3/5/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE RULES OF THE GAME
Perhaps the most influential of all French films, and one of the most richly entertaining. Jean Renoir's legendary butchered and then restored masterpiece is a farce about a large houseparty, gathered for a hunt, where the servants and masters begin to chase and shoot each other. The party at the country château is a tragicomic world in motion; ironically, once the whole mechanism is spinning the man who begins at the center of it—the romantic aviator (Roland Toutain)—is flicked off. The film was released in Paris in 1939 after being cut by the distributors, cut again after violent audience reactions, banned as demoralizing by the Vichy government, and then banned by the Nazis. The original negative was destroyed when the Allies bombed the studios at Boulogne; the picture was reassembled (from two hundred cans of film and bits of soundtrack) and restored in the late fifties. In French.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; April 16.)

SAY IT ISN'T SO
Heather Graham, of the unblinking eyes and curtained blond tresses, and Chris Klein, whose innocence was inviolate in "Election" and "American Pie," get caught in a slapped-together Farrelly Brothers derivative. The gross-out brothers' protégé J. B. Rogers directed it; they produced. At one point, Klein gets his hand stuck up the rear of a cow, a situation that pretty much parallels that of the audience.—*D.D.* (4/9/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

LA STRADA
The theme of Federico Fellini's 1954 spiritual fable is that everyone has a purpose in the universe. It is acted out by three symbolic characters. Giulietta Masina is the waif Geisomina (soul, innocence, spirit, dreams); Anthony Quinn is the strong man Zampanò (brute physical strength, man as animal); Richard Basehart is an artist-fool (mind). Though the background of the film is neorealist poverty, it is transformed by the romanticism of the conception. Even if you reject the concepts of this movie, its mood and the details of scenes stay with you; a year or two later, a gesture or a situation suddenly brings it all back. In Italian.—*P.K.* (Symphony Space; April 17 at 7.)

THE TAILOR OF PANAMA
A messy adaptation of the John le Carré novel, directed by John Boorman. As Andy Osnard, Pierce Brosnan plays an anti-Bond: the spy who loves nobody except himself. He is sent to Panama, where he recruits a local tailor, Harry Pendel (Geoffrey



At Walter Reade Theatre, Paul McGuigan's "Gangster No. 1."

HERVÉ BLONDON

Rush)—who, like so many le Carré creations, has constructed the story of himself to escape from a shameful, secret past. On the evidence of Harry's tips, Osnard urges London and Washington to back a democratic coup to the tune of several million dollars. Almost no one in this picture is free of corruption, moral, sexual, or financial; the only virtuous character, Harry's wife, Louisa (Jamie Lee Curtis), is barely allowed room to breathe. Boorman wants to turn the novel's rueful satire into something sharp and sweaty, but the tone veers all over the place, and the plot feels like reckless fantasy. With Catherine McCormack as the target of Osnard's lust and Harold Pinter as Harry's uncle Benny; indeed, the film's view of Central American politics could hardly be more Pinterish.—*A.L.* (4/2/01) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

THE WIDOW OF SAINT-PIERRE
In the French colony of Saint-Pierre (an island near Newfoundland) during the middle of the nineteenth century, a captain of the guard (Daniel Auteuil) and his high-minded wife (Juliette Binoche) adopt as their protégé a man who has committed a meaningless murder (Emir Kusturica). The murderer is a sweetheart—a gentle and educable fellow. As the community awaits the arrival of a guillotine and an executioner, the captain and his wife refuse to bow to the logic of capital punishment or to administrative bloody-mindedness. For all its stern moral conviction, Patrice Leconte's film manages to duck the only question worth asking: would a less sympathetic murderer be worth saving from the blade? In French.—*D.D.* (Paris.)

Josie
Mrs. Fotheringham

Opening April 11, "Josie and the Pussycats."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

ALSO PLAYING

AKIRA
Empire 25.

BEFORE NIGHT FALLS (1/8/01)
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Quad Cinema, and Sutton 1 and 2.

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (12/11/00)
Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 64th and 2nd.

THE DAY I BECAME A WOMAN
State.

KEEP THE RIVER ON YOUR RIGHT
First & 62nd Cinemas and Quad Cinema.

SHADOW MAGIC
Eastside Playhouse and Quad Cinema.

SIMON MAGUS
Quad Cinema.

SMELL OF CAMPHOR, FRAGRANCE OF JASMINE
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.

SPY KIDS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.

TRAFFIC (12/25/00 & 1/1/01)
Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.

YI YI (1/8/01)
Cinema Village.

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME (12/18/00)
Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through April 21: "Composing for Film." April 14 at 5: "Altered States" (1980, Ken Russell). ♦ April 15 at 2: "Barton Fink" (†).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—April 11 at 6:50 and 9:20: "Keeper of the Flame" (1942, George Cukor). ♦ April 12-13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Idiots" (1998, Lars Von Trier; in Danish). ♦ April 14 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Zentropa" (1991, Von Trier; in German). ♦ April 15 at 5:30: "The Kingdom II" (1997, Von Trier; in Danish). ♦ April 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Rules of the Game" (†). ♦ April 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Fabulous World of Jules Verne" (1958, Karel Zeman; in Czech).

CINEMA CLASSICS
332 E. 11th St. (971-1015)—April 12-13 at 8 and 10: "The Lost Weekend" (1945, Billy Wilder). ♦ April 14-15 at 6, 8:10, and 10:20: "Some Like It Hot" (1959, Wilder).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through April 26: The films of Ousmane Sembene. April 12-14 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Guelwaar" (1993; in French and Wolof). ♦ April 15-17: "Black Girl" (1966; in French and Wolof).

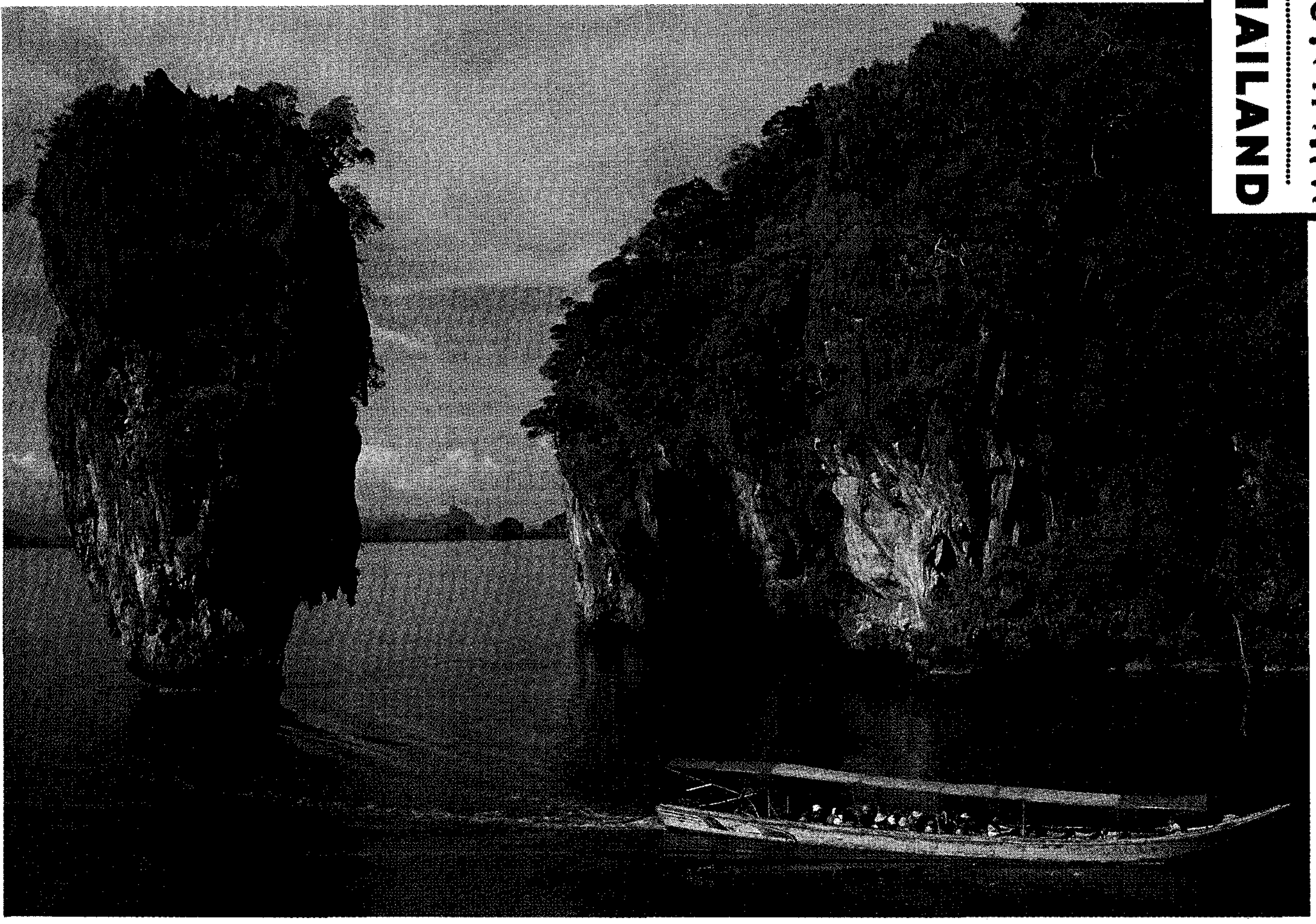
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—"Conversations Between Shadows and Light: Italian Cinematography." April 11 and April 14 at 7: "Radio Days" (1986, Woody Allen). ♦ April 13 at 7 and April 14 at 3: "Red Desert" (1964, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through April 17: A program of films scored by the composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold. April 12 at 2:30: "The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex" (1939, Michael Curtiz). ♦ April 12 at 6: "Kings Row" (1942, Sam Wood). ♦ April 13 at 2:30: "Deception" (†). ♦ April 13 at 6:30: "Anthony Adverse" (1936, Mervyn LeRoy). ♦ April 14 at 2: "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938, Curtiz and William Keighley). ♦ April 14 at 5 and April 16 at 2:30: "Captain Blood" (1935, Curtiz). ♦ April 15 at 2 and April 16 at 6: "The Sea Hawk" (1940, Curtiz). ♦ April 15 at 5 and April 17 at 2:30: "The Sea Wolf" (1941, Curtiz). ♦ April 17 at 6: "Between Two Worlds" (†).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through April 29: Screenings of "Traffik," the British miniseries that inspired Steven Soderbergh's "Traffic." April 12 at 6 and April 14 at 2: Episodes One and Two. ♦ April 13 at 6 and April 15 at 2: Episodes Three, Four, and Five. ♦ "Nick Park's World: The Eccentric Adventures of Wallace and Gromit." April 11-15 at 1 and April 12-13 at 6.

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—"Cinema Italian Style." April 17 at 7: "La Strada" (†). ♦ April 17 at 9: "L'Avventura" (1960, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through April 26: "Contemporary Films from Britain." April 13 at 1:45 and 6:15 and April 14 at 9:15: "Very Annie Mary" (2000, Sara Sugarman). ♦ April 13 at 4 and 8:30, April 14 at 4:45, and April 17 at 5: "Gangster No. 1" (2000, Paul McGuigan). ♦ April 14 at 7 and April 15 at 4:45 and 9: "One Life Stand" (2000, May Miles Thomas). ♦ April 15 at 7 and April 17 at 1 and 9:20: "House!" (2000, Julian Kemp). ♦ Movies for kids. April 14-15 at 2: "Pollyanna" (1960, David Swift).



Chris Lisle/CORBIS

NATURE'S ARCHITECTURE

On an easygoing day trip by boat from Phuket, Pang Nga Bay's signature limestone monolith will remind film aficionados of "The Man With the Golden Gun."

ADVENTURE EDEN

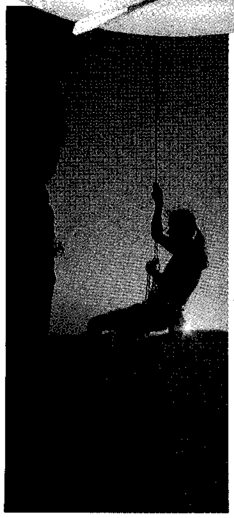
BY | NELL NELSON

As the hazy mid-morning sun trickled through the dense foliage, we stopped to visit an elephant training camp near Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand. We had already ridden elephants through the jungle for several hours, sitting on wooden seats strapped to the noble animals' wide backs (there's room for two, and it's surprisingly comfortable). The driver rides up front on the elephant's neck, and he steers it with his feet. Sitting so high up, we had an elephant's-eye view of the virgin Thai forest. (We also had the occasional encounter with a bunch of bananas whenever our elephant decided to make a sudden, hungry ascent up a slope.) Chiang Mai has several elephant training camps where the intelligent creatures learn forestry work. Visitors are welcome to drop by the camps in the morning to watch the elephants shift huge logs.

Chiang Mai is a popular area that offers a unique combination of outdoor activities—jungle trekking on foot, riding on the backs of elephants, and meandering down gentle, flowing rivers on rafts made of bamboo poles strapped together. On such treks, visitors can stay overnight in tribal villages—a good way to become acqainted with ethnic hill tribes such as the Karen, the Hmong, and the Mien (whose women wear broad black turbans and red fur boas). Jungle treks can be arranged to meet the individual traveller's schedules, fitness and stamina levels, and general tolerance for the absence of air conditioners.

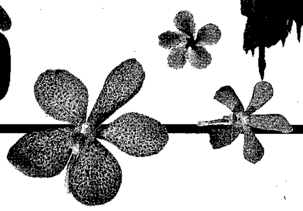
Thailand is a three-thousand-mile-long adventure playground that's warm all year long, with an average temperature of eighty-two degrees. Such a pleasant climate stretches from the Burmese/Laos border in the north to the Malaysian border in the south (roughly the distance between New York and Miami). Thailand has four distinct regions—the mountainous north with its lush jungles, a dry northeast plateau, a fertile central plains, and a long southern peninsula with palm-fringed, white-sand beaches.

WHAT'S NEW



Visit Amazing Thailand, make a trip of unforgettable experiences and challenging adventures. Be transported into a world of discovery... whether by land or by sea, there's an activity for everyone. Rest assured that a visit to Thailand will take you well beyond your expectations, leaving you exhilarated, and yearning for more.

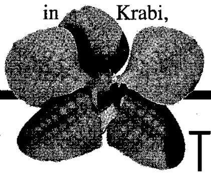
EXTREME THAILAND



ULTIMATE ROCK CLIMBING

Conquer steep limestone cliffs

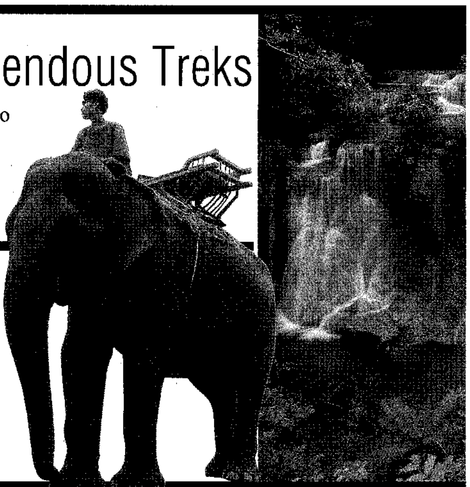
Face with an intensive rock climbing experience in Krabi, one of the hottest locations in the world. Be thrilled and exhilarated by the challenging climb, then relaxed and rewarded by the 360-degree view of the Andaman Sea when they finally reach the 100-meter pinnacle.



HIKING

Tremendous Treks

Trek through the dense tropical rainforest. Venture up to remote hill tribe villages. Experience the unique way of life and culture of real mountain spirits in person. Hikers in Thailand will enter a fascinating world of discovery with every new step they take.



ELEPHANT TREKKING

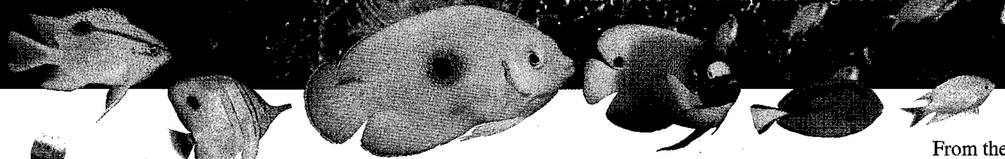
A jungle adventure from a new perspective

Ride on the world's largest land animal while in Kanchanaburi or the northern provinces of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Experience an enchanting view of the tropical wildlife, see menacing tigers, playful deers and over 3,000 species of flora found in Khao Yai, Thailand's first national park.

DEEP DIVING

Mysterious encounters under the sea

Visit one of the world's best dive sites. Explore a house reef and hundreds of untouched coral reefs that are home to an abundance of fascinating and colourful marine creatures in the Similan Islands. From Manta Rays to Whale Sharks, every dive into the Andaman Sea will impress and liven up those log books!



RAPID RIDING

Battle Raging Rapids

From the mighty rivers of Pai in northern Thailand to the roaring rapids of the Mae Klong river, there's a white water haven perfect for everyone! The magnificent waterfalls and hot springs liven up each ride, impressing enthusiasts far beyond their expectations in Umpang, Tak Province. The competitive prices make Thailand one of the best places in the world for an exhilarating white water holiday.

SEA CANOEING

Explore recesses of hidden caves

Take a leisurely paddle in an eco-friendly kayak. Weave through coastal mangrove forests and explore the hundreds of tiny islands that dot the Southern provinces of Krabi and Phuket. Skirted by white sand beaches, the islands tempt you to enter their hidden caves.

Contact: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Los Angeles: 611 North Larchmont Boulevard, 1st Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90004 Tel. (1323) 461-9814 Fax. (1323) 461-9834 E-mail: tatla@ix.netcom.com,
New York: 1 World Trade Center, Suite No. 3729, New York, N.Y. 10048 Tel. (1212) 432-0433 Fax. (1212) 912-0920 E-mail: tatny@aol.com or 1-800 THAILAND Internet: www.tourismthailand.org

INSIDE INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

The least crowded months are May, June, and September. For visiting most of Thailand, the best times are from November through February. (Tip: While the rainy season may be in July, August, and September, precip generally lasts for only thirty minutes a day with refreshingly cooling results.)

WHERE TO STAY

Chiang Mai: Amari Hotel, Westin Chiang Mai, and the Regent Chiang Mai. Or, for a more hands-on Thai experience, contact the Chiang Mai Guest House Association.

Phuket: The Boathouse Inn, Kata Beach is a small boutique hotel on the beach with a first-rate seafood restaurant and an exemplary wine cellar. (Tip: The most important festival in Phuket is the lunar Taoist vegetarian fest that takes place in late September through early October.)

WHERE TO EAT

Garden restaurants are a specialty of Chiang Mai, the most famous being Suan Aahaan Chiang Mai. Be sure to indulge in the exotic fruit drinks there.

NATURE TOURS

www.siamsafari.com
www.journeysinternational.com
www.aandktours.com

PHONE HOME

There are two kinds of public pay phones in Thailand—red and blue. Red phones are for local city calls; blue phones are for long-distance use. (Useful to remember: Thailand is eleven hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time.)

WHAT TO PACK

With few foreign visitors conversant in the language, it'll be easy to impress the Thais by mastering a few words and a phase or two. "Thai Phrasebook" (Lonely Planet) and "Robertson's Practical English–Thai Dictionary" (Charles E. Tuttle) will come in handy.

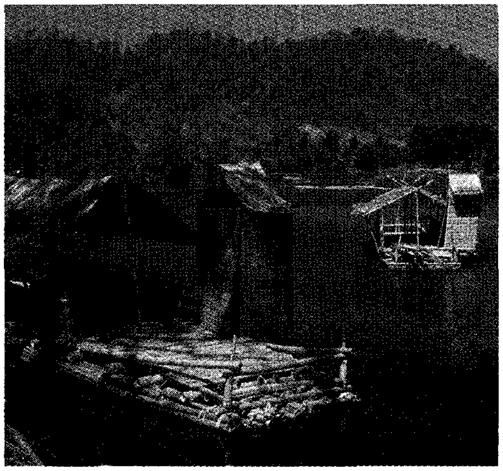
High mountains mean waterfalls, and white-water rafting is fast becoming a popular sport in Northern Thailand. The best time to partake in this adventure is from June to October, when the rivers swell with flood waters. I've been there in December, and it was rather like sitting in a Jacuzzi with a life jacket and hard hat. **Mae Hong Son's Pai River** smashes an angry path towards Burma, and is renowned for adventures to tell the grandchildren about someday. Rafting involves a combination of events: First, you're simply carried along by the current. Then, there's hard teamwork with paddles as you negotiate the rocks. Afterwards come the rapids—a white-water rush towards oblivion. Finally, there's a stunning calm as you emerge, drenched and blinking, in the pristine stillness of an untouched river paradise.

Rock climbing is also a popular sport in Thailand. It can be practiced all over the country, and at all levels, from jungle climbs to sea-cliff scaling in Krabi. An excellent way to learn is to follow in the bootsteps of the Royal Thai Army. Modeled on military training, soft adventure courses are provided at more than ten different Army centers in Thailand. Visitors learn basic jungle survival skills, tower jumping, cliff scaling, and mountain biking.

With nearly two thousand miles of coastline, Thailand is a prime destination for water sports—from sea kayaking and windsurfing to diving, swimming, and sunbathing. In southern Thailand, the Andaman Sea's crystal-clear blue waters and myriad schools of colorful exotic fish make activities like snorkeling and diving seem like you're navigating the inside of an oversized tropical fish tank. Reef dives are particularly rewarding as there are hundreds of different types of coral as well as a variety of unusual species of fish.

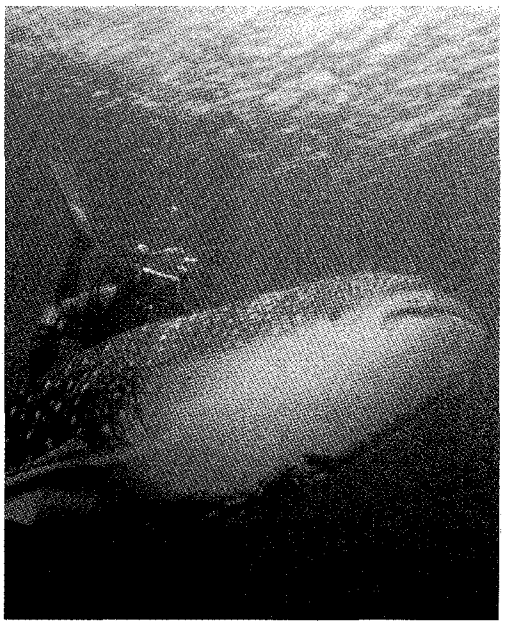
Touring coastal limestone formations by sea kayak is a memorable way to experience their beauty, with only an occasional splash of a paddle to break the silence. And if you are searching for the perfect beach, Thailand has plenty of candidates. Phi Phi Leh (in the Ko Phi Phi National Marine Park and one of two islands that are about twelve miles southeast of Phuket) is generally uninhabited, but you can make day trips from Phi Phi to visit its sheer cliffs, sea caves, and sea lake. Phi Phi Leh is also noted for the birds which build nests prized by Chinese gourmets and for its caves, which hold prehistoric paintings of Viking ships. But with only so much one can pack into a single trip, may I recommend pausing long enough for a Mae Kong, the national rice whisky drink of choice? You can sip in time to the rustling fronds that likely will help inspire plans for your next Thai adventure.

(Nell Nelson is a food and travel writer based in Hong Kong. She has just written a cookbook, "Eat Cook Hong Kong.")



HOUSEBOATS ON THE KOK RIVER

Made of bamboo and reeds, Thai houseboats navigate the river at Tha Ton in the province of Chiang Mai.

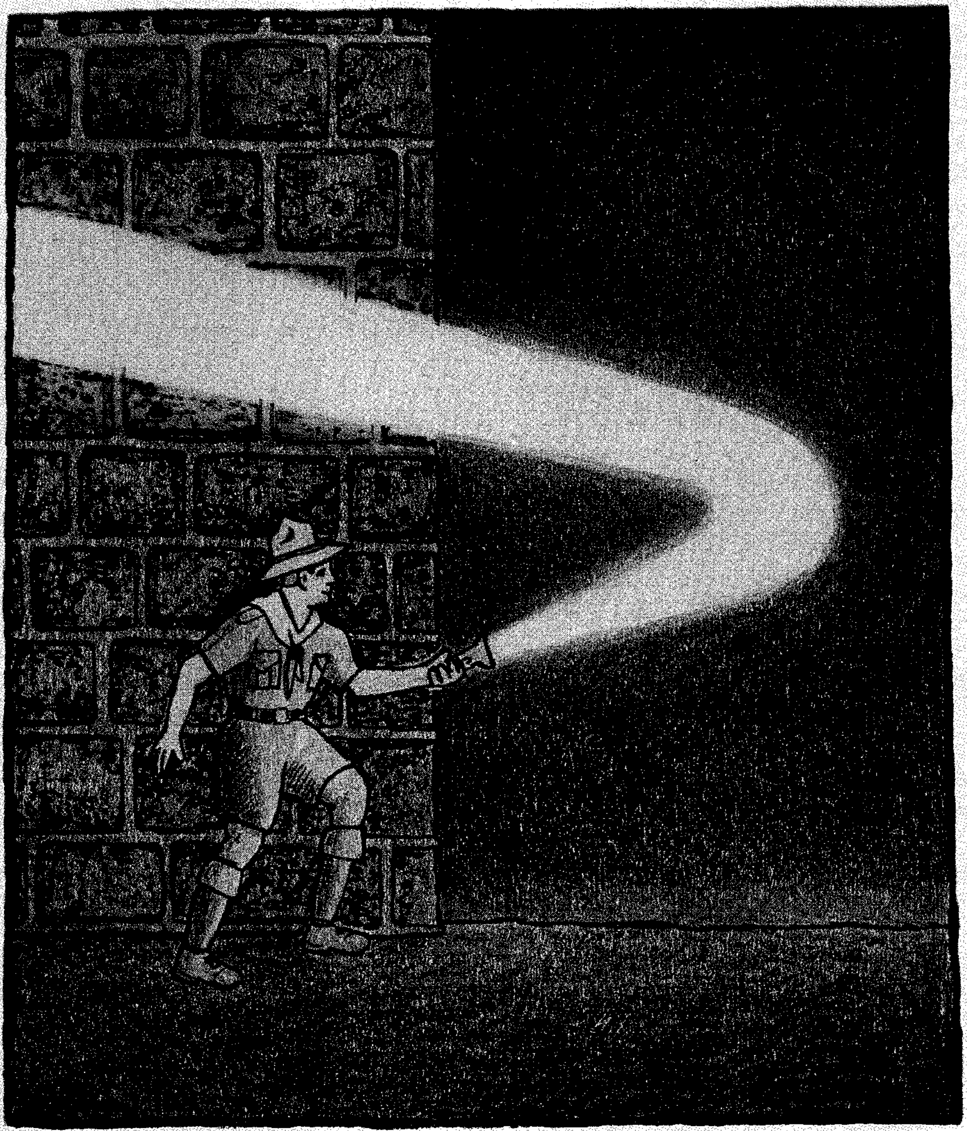


JUMPING OFF POINTS

Thailand's nearly two thousand miles of coastline and its extensive islands are popular among divers for their mild waters and diverse marine life.

Top: diving image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand; *bottom:* Roman Soumar/CORBIS

For more information on travel to Thailand, contact the Tourism Authority of Thailand at 212-432-0433, 1-800-THAILAND (outside New York), or visit www.tourismthailand.org.



ROBIN NOTICED THE PROBLEM ALMOST IMMEDIATELY

While some solutions are readily apparent, others require deeper insight. With capital markets experience across all industries, First Union Securities has guided hundreds of growing companies through complex strategic decisions with unmatched private equity investing, advisory services and capital-raising solutions. Our ideas can help you achieve your goals.

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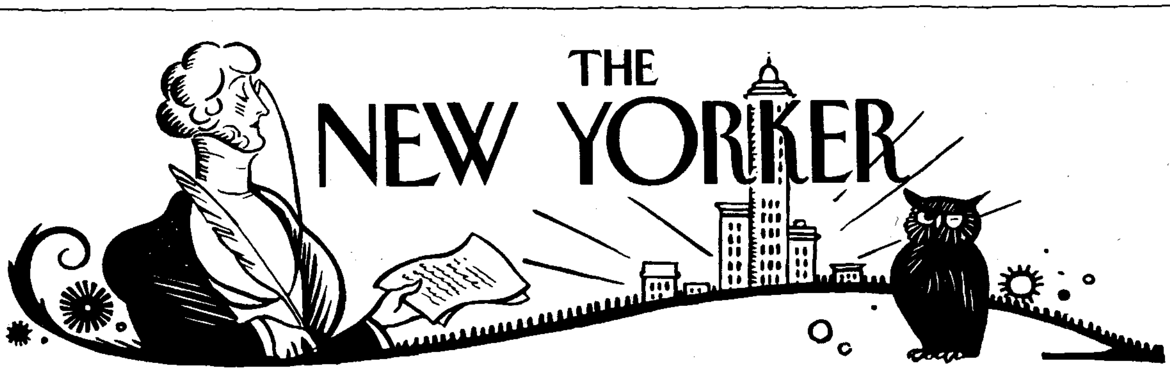


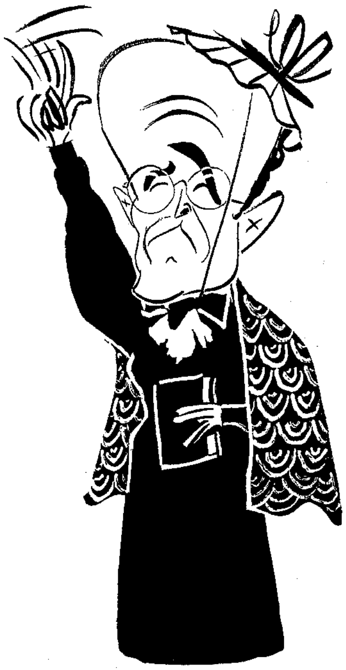
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
YO MAYOR'S LAST PANEL

Last week, Mayor Giuliani finally got around to naming the members of his new advisory committee on the arts, though at the last minute he seemed unsure of what to call the thing. "If you want to call it a decency panel, good," the Mayor told reporters who attended the announcement ceremony, in the Blue Room at City Hall. "If you want to call it an indecency panel, I don't know—maybe you're more comfortable with that."

At this point, no one, not even the indecency panelists themselves, seems to know exactly what it is the indecency panel is supposed to do. The Mayor's charge to the group is that it somehow formulate standards for the city's publicly funded museums, which could be an exercise as abstract as a Miró or could involve passing judgment on actual art works in actual galleries. Clearly, it was one particular work, Renée Cox's "Yo Mama's Last Supper," now on exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, that set the Mayor off. It's a fifteen-foot-long photograph that shows the Twelve Apostles gathered around the table, at the center of which Cox has put herself, standing stark naked. Like Chris Ofili's collage of the Virgin Mary daubed with elephant dung, which was shown at the museum eighteen months ago, "Yo Mama's Last Supper" has been deemed by the Mayor to be anti-Catholic. "I'm going to look at what penalties are available for this," Giuliani declared when he first saw a photograph of the photograph, back in February.

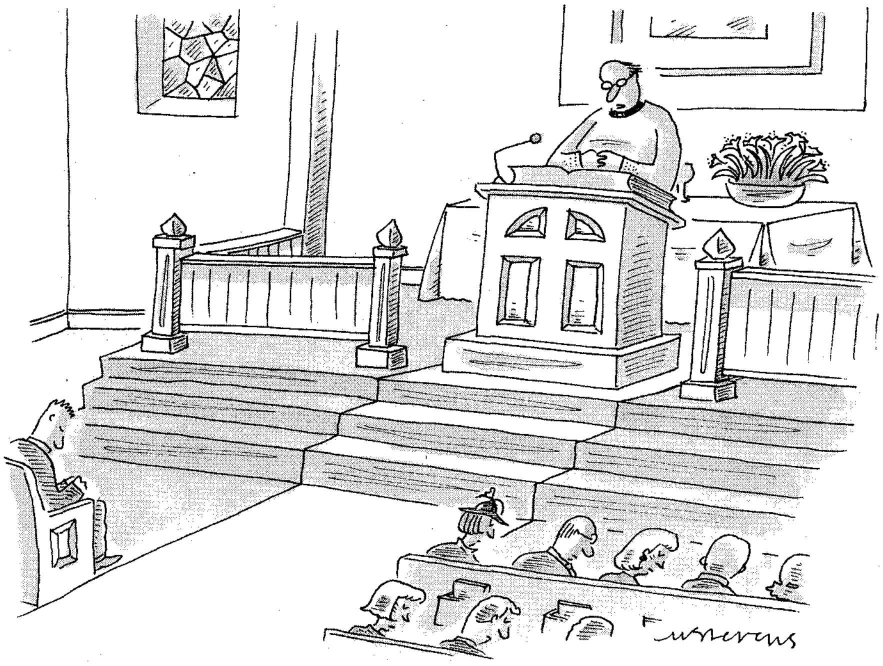
Giuliani had hoped to recruit several minor celebrities for his crusade against indecency, including Peter Max, the Pop artist; LeRoy Neiman, the sporting-events illustrator; and Danny Aiello, the actor. All of them apparently turned him down, with the result that the best known of the panel's members ended up being Curtis Sliwa, the radio talk-show host and the founder of the Guardian Angels; Raoul Felder, the divorce lawyer, who, as it happens, is representing the Mayor in his proceedings against his wife, Donna Hanover; and Bartle Bull, the lawyer, novelist, and former publisher of the *Village Voice*. (The *Post's* Page Six column hastened to dig up a part from Bull's latest novel in which a one-eyed dwarf ravishes his beautiful attendant; there was no word on whether the city's public libraries would be acquiring the title.) Artists are represented by three panel members: a painter who specializes in landscapes; one who specializes in commissioned portraits of C.E.O.s; and an illustrator who is married to a conservative Republican state senator from Queens. The Mayor complained that reporters were to blame for his difficulties, saying they had "intimidated" potential members and "demonized" his efforts, but it would probably be more accurate to say that the press, like the rest of the city, treated the panel as a joke.



Rudolph W. Giuliani

Giuliani was a formidable presence in his first term, whether he was being admired or loathed. There was no subject on which he did not seem completely confident of his judgment, both in practical terms and in moral ones. The Mayor's posture has not changed, even as circumstances have, with consequences that are inescapably parodic. As he was pulling together his indecency commission last month, the Mayor escorted his girlfriend, Judith Nathan, to

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"And may the Lord in his wisdom see to it that we get our hands on some of that government scratch."

• •

the annual City Hall reporters' show, where, just for the fun of it, he put on fishnet stockings and danced with the Rockettes.

At the start of his second term, Giuliani was an exceptionally popular mayor at a time of extraordinary prosperity. Yet, instead of availing himself of this opportunity, he used it to go after jaywalkers, taxicab drivers, and street artists, moving from one petty crusade to the next. The fervor that might have seemed appropriate when the subject was fighting crime or reforming welfare became risible when applied to hot-dog venders—Dionysus bickering with the frogs. In the last three and half years, there has been only one brief time when he seemed at all interested in breaking out of this routine, and that was last spring, when he dropped out of the Senate race. Giuliani said then that he was going to use his last year in office to reach out to the city's less fortunate and disaffected citizens, only, evidently, to forget about it.

As a practical matter, of course, the Mayor's latest campaign is hopeless. It's not possible to write guidelines for decent—or even halfway decent—art, and whatever recommendations the panel comes up with the next mayor is sure to toss out, along with the indecency panel itself. In the meantime, the task of influencing artists and curators to be more circumspect is likely to be as rewarding as telling kids not to stick peas up their noses. Surely Giuliani himself is aware of these difficulties; by now he has had enough experience to recognize a self-defeating campaign when he launches one. Maybe he just can't help himself. Or maybe he doesn't want to.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

AT THE THEATRE
THE VOICE

After fifteen years in clubs and television and movies and various benefit performances as an actress or a choreographer or a dancer or a director or a producer or just a voice, Rosie Perez was poised last week to go onstage as the leading actress in the drama "References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot," a new play by José Rivera at the Public Theatre.

"I'm a very pragmatic person," Perez said one recent afternoon in her dressing room, just before previews started. "I have to have a logical reason for whatever I do. It's not like I think all the time of being a great actress or anything like that. Acting was never my aspiration. I went to college in California to study marine biology. Even today, most of my friends are not actors. A lot of my friends are the d.j.s in the clubs. As a little kid growing up in Brooklyn, I was very introverted. One day, my class at school went to the theatre to see 'The Wiz' with Stephanie Mills. It changed my life. It made me feel I could do anything. On the bus going home, I couldn't stop talking about it, and a kid was laughing at me. I got very angry with him, and I had to punch him.

"I didn't have a privileged childhood. My father lives in Puerto Rico. My aunt—she raised me—died a few months ago. She and some other good-hearted people, camp counsellors, people like that, came into my life and changed me. My aunt would tell me, 'If you have a piece of bread, save a corner of it for yourself and give the rest away.' This sounds corny, but every night, before I go onstage, I pray, Let me do it for them. But I'm not officially religious. I lost my religion and became spiritual.

"When my aunt passed, it was a struggle for me. I used to love to listen to her. She would say, 'Rosie, never be afraid to be kind. Never be afraid to be pissed off, either.' I have two teen-age-actor protégés. I teach them. I encourage them never to give up. Excuse me, I've got to take my Throat Coat."

She unscrewed a bottle top and took a swallow. "There. Throat Coat. That's what all actors have to take for their voice.

"My aunt worked two jobs, making Slim Jims in one plant and pork rinds in another. When we had nothing else to eat, we had to eat Slim Jims and pork rinds. My aunt had five children of her own, and we all lived together in four rooms. I loved getting into bed with my aunt and listening to her tell me things. She taught me who I am. She spoke Spanish and some English. Today, I don't speak Spanish; I speak Spanglish. I'll say, '*Me voy*. I'm going to do *compras* at the *supermercado*.'

"To learn marine biology, I went to two different community colleges in

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Martin Amis and Norman Mailer
7 P.M. Angel Orensanz Foundation
172 Norfolk Street

Donald Antrim and T. Coraghessan Boyle
7 P.M. Joe's Pub at the Public Theatre
425 Lafayette Street

Ann Beattie and Richard Ford
9:30 P.M. Angel Orensanz Foundation
172 Norfolk Street

Peter Carey and Annie Proulx
7 P.M. Altman Building
135 West 18th Street

Michael Cunningham and Deborah Eisenberg
7 P.M. No Moore
234 West Broadway at North Moore Street

Edwidge Danticat and Tim O'Brien
7 P.M. Mercury Lounge
217 East Houston Street

Junot Díaz and Nathan Englander
9:30 P.M. Knitting Factory
74 Leonard Street

Roddy Doyle and George Saunders
7 P.M. Knitting Factory
74 Leonard Street

Jeffrey Eugenides and David Schickler
7 P.M. The Bitter End
147 Bleecker Street

Nick Hornby and Zadie Smith
9:30 P.M. Bowery Ballroom
6 Delancey Street

Matthew Klam and Jonathan Franzen
7 P.M. Fez, under Time Café
380 Lafayette Street

Jhumpa Lahiri and (reader TBA)
7 P.M. Bowery Ballroom
6 Delancey Street

Rick Moody and Tobias Wolff
7 P.M. Shine
285 West Broadway at Canal Street

Lorrie Moore and Julian Barnes
9:30 P.M. Altman Building
135 West 18th Street

Walter Mosley and Marisa Silver
9:30 P.M. The Bitter End
147 Bleecker Street

California. When I left school, in 1988, my friends gave me a going-away party at the Funky Reggae club in L.A. It happened that Spike Lee was there. He was holding what he called a Big Butt Contest—to find the woman with the biggest butt. I yelled at him. I called him names. I called him a chauvinist pig. He didn't get mad at me. He gave me a part in his movie 'Do the Right Thing.'

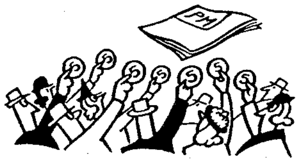
"I just finished the film 'Human Nature.' I play an electrolysis technician, and one of my clients is a very hairy woman who falls in love with a man who was raised as an ape. I remove her hair and we become best friends. It's really cool. I would love to do a musical, but so far no go. I have a novelty voice, but Betty Buckley I'm not.

"I was filming 'Widows' in Toronto last fall when I got a call from George C. Wolfe. He said he had this play by José Rivera that would be perfect for me. I read it on the plane coming to New York for the weekend. It clicked. It's about the lonely, romantic wife of an Army sergeant, and what they want from each other when he comes home from the Gulf War. José Rivera hates the term, but it's magic realism. Did I say that I'm off the beaten path, that I beat to a different drum?"

—*Lillian Ross*

INK

WHO OWNS BASEBALL?



By convention, sports in America is treated as news. Journalists who write about the movie that opened last night are called reviewers. Journalists who write about Julia Roberts's love life are called gossip columnists. But journalists who write about the baseball game that was played yesterday, or about Derek Jeter's new haircut, are called reporters. This essentially arbitrary distinction—between what are, after all, simply two types of privately owned entertainment business—is such a fantastic boon to the sports industry that it is hard to understand why anyone on the industry side of the arrangement would wish even to call attention to it. But Major League Baseball has. At the start of the season, it announced new restrictions (and the enforcement of some old restrictions that no one had paid much attention to) on the information that journalists gather at ballgames.

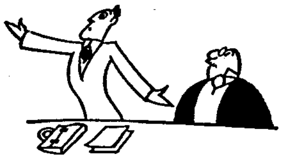
Major League Baseball wants to limit the use of the pictures that newspaper and magazine photographers take inside the park to news coverage of the game. It wants to prevent, for instance, a newspaper from using those pictures for its own commercial or promotional purposes without the permission of the baseball commissioner. In legal terms, Major League Baseball's position is that when a team issues a press pass to a reporter or a photographer it is licensing the use of a product that it owns—as when George Lucas licenses the manufacture of a Wookie doll. In setting off down this road, Major League Baseball is following the lead of the National Basketball Association, which is currently suing the *Times* for offering for sale on its Web site five pictures taken at the 1999 N.B.A. playoffs by the paper's photographers. The standard clause in the agreement that members of the press are supposed to enter into when they receive their credentials refers to any "account, description, [or] picture" of the game, and this suggests that Major League Baseball may hope to control the future use not only of photographs of the games but of written accounts as well. It is as though the writers were working for Major League Baseball, with their nominal employers, the newspapers, entitled to a onetime use of the material. The press, not surprisingly, is balking. "The underlying issue," George Freeman, the *Times's* lawyer on this matter, has said of Major League Baseball, "is that it views a baseball game as a private performance whose information it totally controls, rather than a public news event which ought to be in the public domain." Exactly.

The desire to control not only an event but the image of an event may seem vaguely Orwellian; but the image of an event, and nothing more palpable, is, in fact, what the sports business sells. You don't take a baseball game home and put it in your living room. You watch it, and, when it's over, the "accounts, descriptions, and pictures" are all that remain. In a sense, "accounts, descriptions, and pictures" are all that was there in the first place. What you get is entirely what you see. Since the cost of mounting the spectacle is huge, and is growing huger every year, some anxiety about sharing the income that flows from its consumption is natural. But does the cost really exceed the benefit? Major League Baseball is a business that enjoys free, extensive, and almost entirely upbeat publicity about its product every day, in virtually every newspaper and on almost every television news show in the country, and all on the theory that baseball is news, rather than merely entertainment. The notion that the people who cover baseball are "news gatherers" is crucial to the whole deal. It is what allows them to treat what happens on the field at Yankee Stadium as though it were more "real" than what happens on the stage at the Metropolitan Opera. It makes a ballgame a story, rather than a show.

There has been some talk about the press refusing to cover major-league baseball games unless a more satisfactory agreement can be worked out, but this is talk that newspaper publishers are unlikely to encourage. The exact percentage of Americans who buy a newspaper every day for the sole purpose of checking the scores is a fact that, if it were known, would probably not do much to boost the national self-esteem, for that percentage is undoubtedly substantial. Papers help sell sports, but sports help sell papers, too. A more diabolical method of protest would be to take Major League Baseball up on its insistence on treating its product as a private performance, and to cover the games in that spirit. If journalists wrote about baseball in the same way that they write about movies, the sports page would read very differently. Reporters would be obliged to point out how predictable and derivative most games are. They would note that a particular running catch in the outfield may look original and impressive but is actually a cheap knockoff of a play made by Willie Mays in an earlier performance. They would complain about how stale and conventional the intentional walk truly is (can managers invent no wittier way of putting a man on base?), or about how the promise held out in the first few innings of a game is so often betrayed in a bathetic finale of ground balls, pop-ups, and called third strikes. And then there is the dreadful cliché—how many times must we sit through it?—of the game-winning home run in the bottom of the ninth, more often than not hit by the rookie shortstop, a scrappy home-town kid, up against the most grizzled and fearsome closer in the league. . . . No, it's too awful. Baseball cannot stand up to the standards of show business. It's better off pretending to be news.

—*Louis Menand*

THE BENCH
LAWYERS WHO LOVE TROLLOPE



Matrimonial lawyers are often called upon to quiet the inflamed emotions of their clients, but beneath the sober suit and the ameliorative demeanor may beat a passionate heart. Stanley Plesent is one such lawyer, and that is why, last Tuesday evening, he was rushing around a cocktail reception at the New York Bar Association, distributing large buttons bearing the slogan "Trollope Lives!"

The occasion was a lecture on the subject of family law and Victorian fiction, delivered by Valentine Cunningham, a professor of English literature at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. It was organized by the matrimonial committee of the Bar Association, the Trollope Society, and the Cardozo Law School for the purpose of honoring Plesent, in whose name a family-law program was recently created. Plesent, who just turned seventy-five, became a devoted Trollopian six years ago, and has since read all forty-seven novels. (In the same period, his firm, Squadron Ellenoff Plesent & Sheinfeld, has handled the divorce of, among others, Rupert Murdoch.) "Reading, other than briefs and cases, has been a lesser aspect of my life, but Trollope has helped open me up to literature," Plesent said.

Monroe Price, a Cardozo professor, introduced Professor Cunningham as "having written many of the books that members of the audience would like to have written." This drew rueful laughter from the crowd, which was made up of family-law types and members of the Trollope Society. Professor Cunningham, who wore a beard, a silver crewcut, and a pair of wire-rimmed glasses but eschewed the "Trollope Lives!" button, began his lecture with a nod to Plesent, and remarked, "Any lawyer who is keen on Trollope is rather like a poacher who is keen on gamekeepers." He then proceeded to discuss, with donnish mellifluousness, the fascination that the law held for Trollope and his peers. "Victorian fiction is obsessed by law and lawyers," he said—a wise observation to make if one wants to get on the right side of a group of lawyers obsessed with Victorian fiction. Cunningham—his speech augmented by many persuasive "is it not"s and "did he not"s, sometimes both in the same sentence—went on to draw comparisons between novelistic power, legal power, and the power of God. "Novelists are legislators of the worlds of their own fictions," he said. "The law decides stories: judges judge, juries decide, and the end of a trial is like the end of the world in miniature. And this, of course, is like the last pages of a novel."

The assembled lawyers were attentive—if not wholly comprehending—as Cunningham did some fancy stuff with the etymological link between *lex* (Latin for "law") and *legere* (Latin for "read"), and talked about the "post-Saussurean nightmare" of the legal papers piling up in "Bleak House." When he got to Trollope, he pointed out the author's reverence for the law of inheritance. "Think of the magic of legal paperwork," he said, as he discussed the scene in "Doctor Thorne" in which the doctor produces and sorts out documents that reveal Mary Thorne to be the surprise inheritor of the Scatcherd fortune. "The absolute power of the legal papers just vibrates on the page," he noted with enthusiasm.

After the talk, Professor Cunningham fielded a few questions, and, while his audience seemed pleased to be addressed by someone who recognized the magic of legal paperwork, some took umbrage at Cunningham's assumption of the primacy of English Victorian literature. Conrad Harper, a Trollope enthusiast and a partner at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, pointed out that, for all the English novelists' fascination with crime and detectives, "they had an earlier master, and he was one of us"—Edgar Allan Poe. Sandra Jacobson, a past president of the New York Women's Bar Association, who sat in the back row in a blue suit and New Balance sneakers, observed with satisfaction that many of Trollope's plots concerning marriage and property could never have happened here, because of the introduction, in 1848, of the Married Women's Act.

After he stepped down from the podium, Professor Cunningham expressed surprise that Trollope's more unattractive aspects—his anti-Semitism, for example—didn't get him into more trouble among his New York devotees. "Some of it is a fetish about England—an extraordinary love of Englishness," the professor said, reflectively. "Trollope can get away with murder. He can do no wrong. But then you do just sink into the arms of Trollope."

—*Rebecca Mead*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
OUR DEBT TO BANKRUPTCY

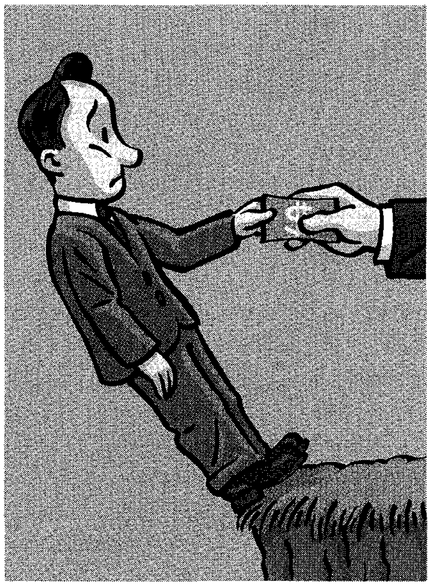
Ancient Rome was the wrong place to find yourself in debt. You could be sold into slavery to satisfy your creditors, and there was the even more dismaying prospect of dismemberment. If you weren't valuable enough as a potential slave, your creditors could seize you and chop up your body, dividing the pieces among themselves in proportion to their claims on you.

Luckily, the chopping block never quite caught on in America, and we abolished debtors' prisons a while ago. Instead, Americans have preferred to let debtors—individuals and businesses alike—declare bankruptcy. This doesn't mean that you walk away from all your bills free and clear. Bankruptcy grants an individual some relief from his debts and protects a small amount of his property. And it allows a company to negotiate with its creditors, restructuring itself and staying in business or selling off its assets. In either case, the idea is the same: you should not be encumbered forever by debts you incurred in the past.

For big lenders like banks and credit-card companies, though, the chopping block isn't wholly without appeal. They're behind the current bill in Congress that would change the rules for debtors, making it harder to declare bankruptcy and shrinking the protections it offers. It may be the first major legislation that President Bush signs into law. But what's good for American Express isn't necessarily good for America.

Why, after all, do we have bankruptcy laws? We could just have a system where someone whose company went under would end up working for his lenders for the next twenty years. The trouble is that such a system doesn't give the debtor much incentive to keep working, since he doesn't get to keep any of the fruits of his labor. The creditors might be able to grab some of the company's assets, but they'd have to be sold at fire-sale prices. And society as a whole loses whatever the company might have produced if it had been able to stay in business. The word "bankrupt," in fact, comes from the Italian *banca rotta*, harking back to the days when creditors would break a deadbeat merchant's bench. Ideally, bankruptcy laws enable the tradesman to keep working. In the end, no one gets exactly what he wants. The tradesman has to pay off some of his debts, and the creditors don't get back every dollar they lent out. But it's a better solution than breaking benches.

The result is to make it more likely that people will take chances with other people's money, since they're not going to get stuck with the full bill if they fail. (Lenders, in turn, take into account the risk of default when they decide how much to charge for their money.) And, of course, we *want* entrepreneurs to take chances—to spend money in an attempt to cure cancer, build a hydrogen-powered scooter, conquer flight, or whatever. And that means assuring them that if they fail they won't be faced with a lifetime of indentured servitude. "Any vibrant free-market economy is going to have lots of failure, so the question is how do you deal with that," Elizabeth Warren, a bankruptcy expert at Harvard Law School, says. "We could treat debt as a kind of taint of the blood, ineradicable, and keep debtors from ever starting a company again. Of course, doing that means that no one would start a company in the first place."



What if we had had a more punitive approach to bankruptcy? Well, we'd have no Texaco, no Macy's, and no Continental Airlines, all of which used Chapter 11 to turn themselves around. We might also be without General Motors, which became an industrial powerhouse only after nearly being foreclosed on twice. In the course of the twentieth century, it got easier for American companies to declare bankruptcy, easier to remain going concerns while they were bankrupt, and easier for those who started them to walk away from a failure without having their reputation crushed. Not coincidentally, America also saw the number of new businesses soar and the pace of technological innovation quicken. It's worth remembering that John Chambers was the head of U.S. operations at the soon-to-be-bankrupt Wang Laboratories before he turned Cisco into the growth stock of the nineties.

If you want to know what the alternative is like, take a close look at Japan. Traditionally, when a company goes bankrupt there, its assets are liquidated and all the top managers fired. And bankruptcy carries with it a stigma that makes it very hard for a ruined businessman to work at another company, let alone to launch one. Not surprisingly, there are very few Japanese startups, and existing Japanese companies tend to be risk-averse to the point of ossification. (Sony and Honda are exceptions, not the rule, among Japanese companies.) The downside for guessing wrong in Japan is so immense that not guessing almost always seems to be the better choice.

The irony is that, even as Congress is doing its best to make America more like the rest of the world, the rest of the world is trying to become more like America. Germany, Britain, and, yes, even Japan have begun the process of loosening their bankruptcy laws in ways that ought to spur entrepreneurship. And there's something especially strange about the spectacle of the Republican Party—traditionally the home of small businessmen and entrepreneurs—making it harder to start a business or to keep one going. A country that discourages bankruptcy makes the past the most important thing about a business, when what we really want companies to be worried about is the future. If you want to succeed in business, sometimes you've got to go for broke.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

NOW EQUIPPED WITH 3-WAY CALLING.
YOU, WHOEVER YOU'RE DIALING, AND THE GOVERNMENT.

January 1998. The European Parliament releases a report that shocks the world. Five nations (the U.S., England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) are members of a spy network that aims to intercept virtually all forms of electronic communications. Its popular name: Echelon. Its purpose: worldwide surveillance—not just of other intelligence agencies, but of civilians. And at the helm is America's very own National Security Agency.

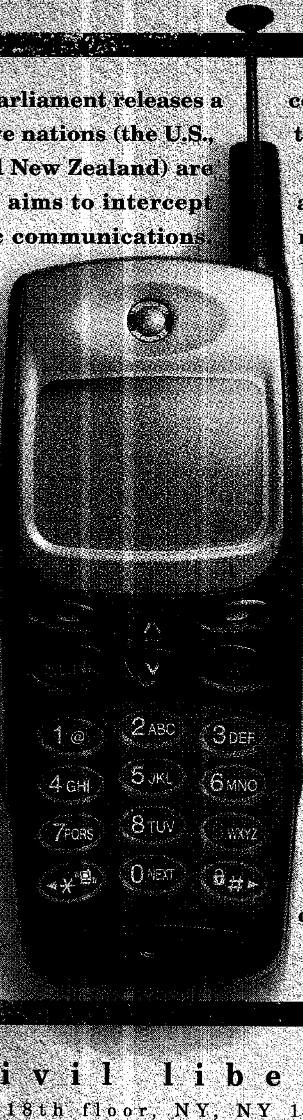
The report details how Echelon works. Land-based antennae capture radio transmissions. Satellites catch "spillover" data as it travels from city to city. And Internet-based "sniffer" devices scan emails and website content.

Other reports prove even more disquieting. Whistle-blowers charge that intelligence agencies interested in spying on their citizenry have asked allies to do it for them, thus avoiding culpability under the laws which prevent unwarranted searches. In our country, this is nothing less than the Fourth Amendment.

Meanwhile, other government agencies have developed their own means of spying on civilians. Under the FBI's Internet wiretap system, called Carnivore, Internet service providers are forced to attach a black box directly to their networks—a powerful computer through which all of their users' communications may flow. This is like giving the FBI the power to go into the Post Office and open each and every mailbag in search of one person's letters.

Our right to privacy is on the brink of extinction. We must act now to put an end to unwarranted government snooping. Visit us at www.aclu.org/privacyrights in order to learn more and to send your Members of Congress a free fax. Although they may not be the only ones reading it.

Please support the ACLU.



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NEW YORK JOURNAL

JUST A BAR

What makes a landmark?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

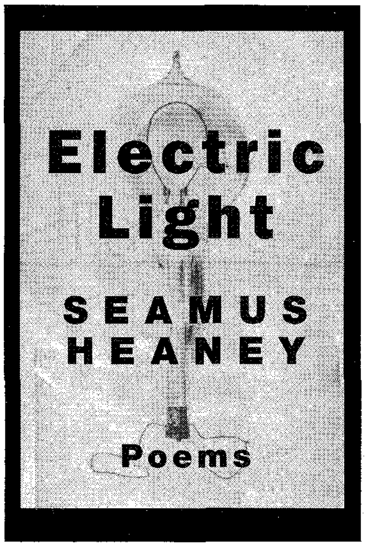
A lot of time in New York is spent fighting what are usually called "symbolic" battles, meaning battles where what is being fought over and what people actually care about are two different things. When gays fight to be included in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, for instance, it is not so much an expression of a keen homoerotic appetite for walking in the March drizzle alongside the Old Hibernians as a symbolic battle over the acceptance of homosexuals at mainstream civic events. But New York also has symbolic battles that really are battles over symbols—where what is being fought over is not what a sign stands for but its existence as a thing in itself. The fight over the Pepsi sign in Long Island City, for instance, was not a battle between Pepsi drinkers and Coke drinkers, or even a battle about soft drinks; it was a fight over the right to keep a familiar sign in a familiar place. When people protested the replacement by G.E. of the RCA sign above 30 Rockefeller Plaza, it was not the corporate takeover they cared about; it was the difference in the civic effect between looking at three Art Deco letters and looking at two. These battles tend to be just as passionate as the more familiar symbolic battles, but they are harder to follow, perhaps because they are so stubbornly literal—as though the essence of homosexuality really were the desire for the company of Old Hibernians in the rain—and at the same time almost philosophical in their implications. If they do have a symbolic meaning, it is not about the meaning of a symbol but about the right to symbolize, to think expansively and metaphorically in a city given to thinking economically about nearly everything.

Of all the recent symbolic battles of this second kind, the fight to keep the Statue of Liberty crown above El Teddy's restaurant, at 219 West Broadway, in Tribeca, has been the most vivid, surprising, and complicated—the most vivacious as well as the most felicitous, to use two favorite words of Bruce Ehrmann, the real-estate agent and local preservationist who is also the chairman of the Landmarks Committee of Community Board 1, which looks after Tribeca. It involves ironies so intricate—beginning with the irony that the defenders of the crown on El Teddy's are using landmarks legislation that was designed, as they freely admit, to prevent architectural oddities like the crown on El Teddy's from being built in the first place—that they have baffled even the understanding of a New York land-use lawyer.

The trouble began about six months ago, when the architect Richard Cook received a commission from the real-estate developer Steven Elghanayan to build him a house. Rick Cook, as everyone calls him, runs a firm on Cooper Square, and is greatly respected for his ability to design new buildings, and get them built, in the historic districts of Chelsea and Tribeca. This is a tiptoe, first-do-no-harm form of architecture, in which so many interest groups have to be placated that practicing it is more like running for City Council than it is like building monuments. Elghanayan had bought the parcel of property at 217-19 West Broadway—where one or another kind of restaurant, called one or another version of El Teddy's, has stood for about sixty years—from its longtime owner, Salvatore Cucinotta, for around three million dollars. Elghanayan wanted to tear down the restaurant and build a two-family house in its place.

This in itself, Rick Cook recognized, was a sign of a new time. Tribeca, which stands for Triangle Below Canal, is wedged among three older quarters—SoHo to the north, Wall Street to the south, and an undefined but grayly imposing neighborhood to the east, which might be called MunicipalWorld, where City Hall and the courts and the Federal Building sit. Like Britain in the medieval

The powerful new collection from the Nobel Prize winner



Electric Light
SEAMUS HEANEY

photo © Caroline Forbes

"Arguably the finest poet now writing in English."
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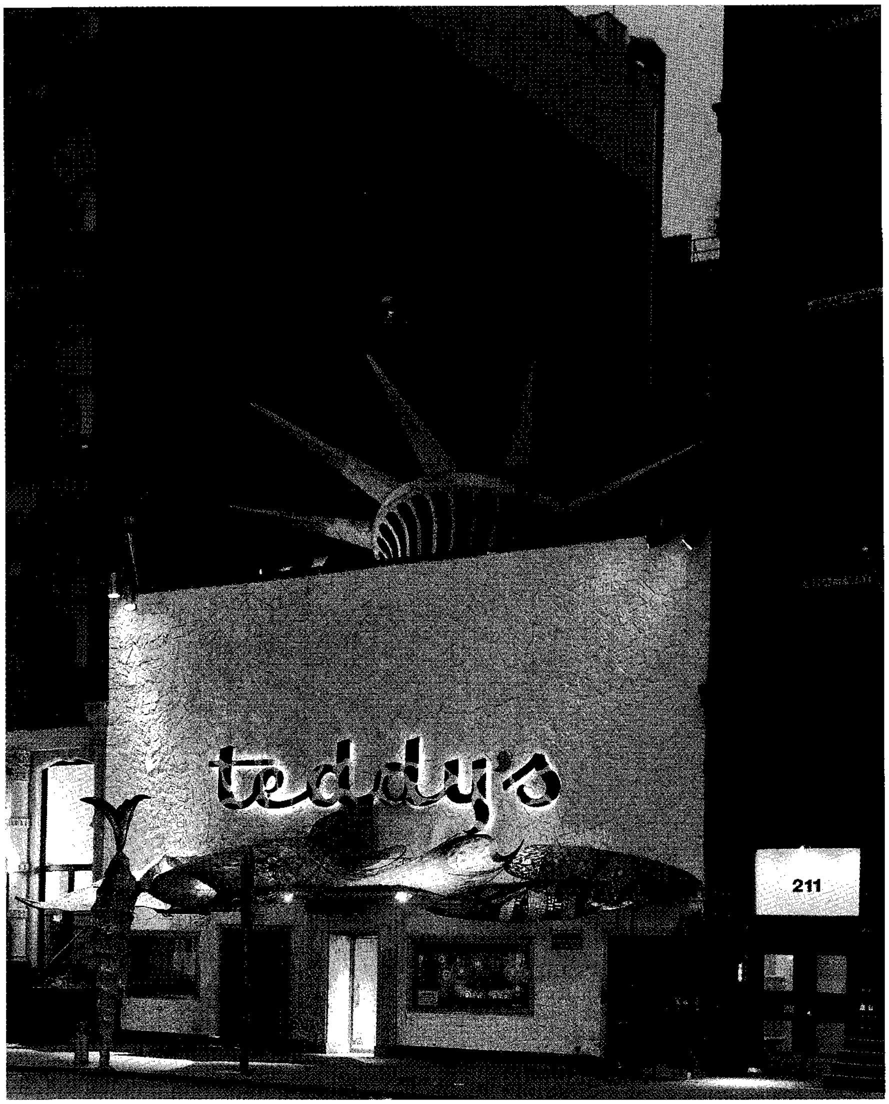
period, Tribeca was first settled by refugees from the north—artists fleeing the development of SoHo—and then suffered a kind of Norman Conquest, an invasion by the swaggering rich guys from the south. "There was never any logical reason why Tribeca couldn't become a bedroom community of Wall Street as easily as it became the frontier of SoHo," a Tribeca real-estate man admits, and this is more or less what has happened. Like the Normans in England learning to eat swine and speak a little Anglo-Saxon, the new masters have incorporated a few of the native customs and institutions. A crowd of kids and parents still congregate on Saturday mornings at Bubby's, the amiable brunch spot that has stood at the corner of Hudson and North Moore for ten years, but the check is, or was, as likely to be financed by a stock offering as by a gallery opening.

Cook began to search for a way of building a new house that would look like the neighborhood and still look like itself. "We looked at a lot of models for a kind of lighter-skinned building within a dark-skinned street front, and we were particularly inspired by, among other things, a post office by the Viennese architect Otto Wagner," he says. Cook also sent an assistant off to find the designation report on the lot from the Landmarks Preservation Commission. A significant portion of Tribeca has been a historic district since the early nineties—that is, every building in the district is potentially protected as a landmark, and every one, no matter how modest, has been documented and catalogued by the commission. (Technically, Tribeca has been divided into four historic districts: east, west, north, and south.) The report on 217-19 West Broadway was reassuring to someone who intended to tear down the building and start over. Cook had been concerned, at first, about what some downtown architects might call being "sniffened" or "snooked." To be sniffened or snooked is to be caught trying to tear down a building designed by an architect unknown to anyone but the fanatic architectural historians of lower Manhattan. Elisha Sniffen was a nineteenth-century commercial architect responsible for cast-iron warehouses in SoHo, and John B. Snook was the Sniffen of Tribeca. Had the name of either of them or anyone like them been attached to the building, however remotely, it would have been nearly impossible to demolish it.

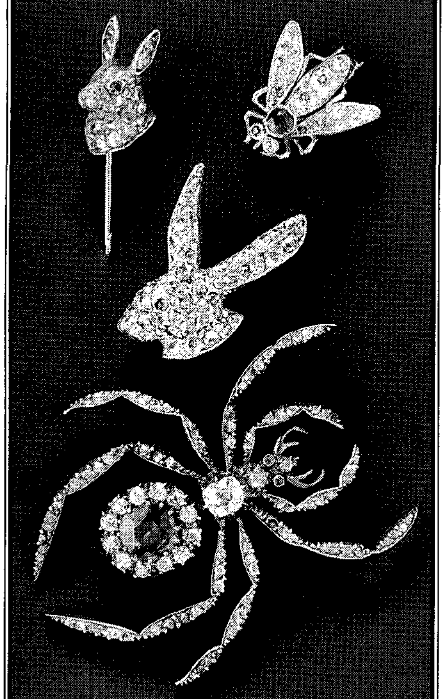
Fortunately, the building's history had nimbly stepped around the corns of the architectural historians. The original building, it turned out, consisted of two separate federal-era town houses—this is why the lot retained the double address—which had been remodelled only in the nineteen-fifties, by an otherwise unknown architect named Louis Bellini. It had then become a steak house called, simply, Teddy's. (This was during the Druidic, or prehistoric, era in the neighborhood, when, long before Tribeca was called Tribeca, it was still a vaguely defined dependency of Little Italy; the habitués of the first Teddy's are usually described as "gravel-voiced.")



For Tribecans, El Teddy's symbolizes an idea of the city. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

In 1985, the restaurant became a tapas bar, on the Barcelona model, called El Internacional. A Spanish artist named Antoni Miralda was in charge of the remodelling and, for reasons lost in the mists of Tribeca history but probably having to do with the Barcelona connection—many of the new tapas bars there incorporated giant, playful sculpture (a particularly famous bar is surmounted by a giant lobster)—and also with the oddity that the Statue of Liberty, waiting to be restored, was at the time invisible under a scaffolding, Miralda decided to build a one-and-a-quarter-ton replica of the Statue of Liberty's crown, and drop it on the roof of the new/old restaurant building. In the Landmarks report, the crown is referred to, discreetly, as "sculpture." Miralda also painted a black-and-white cow pattern on the building's façade. The tapas bar was a modest success—it became known for its blue margaritas. A shot of the crown

Antique Jewels



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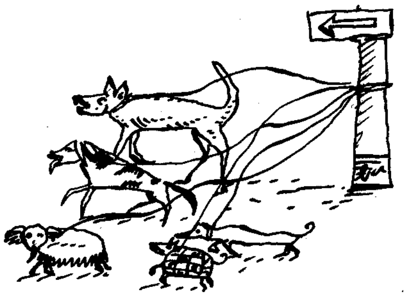
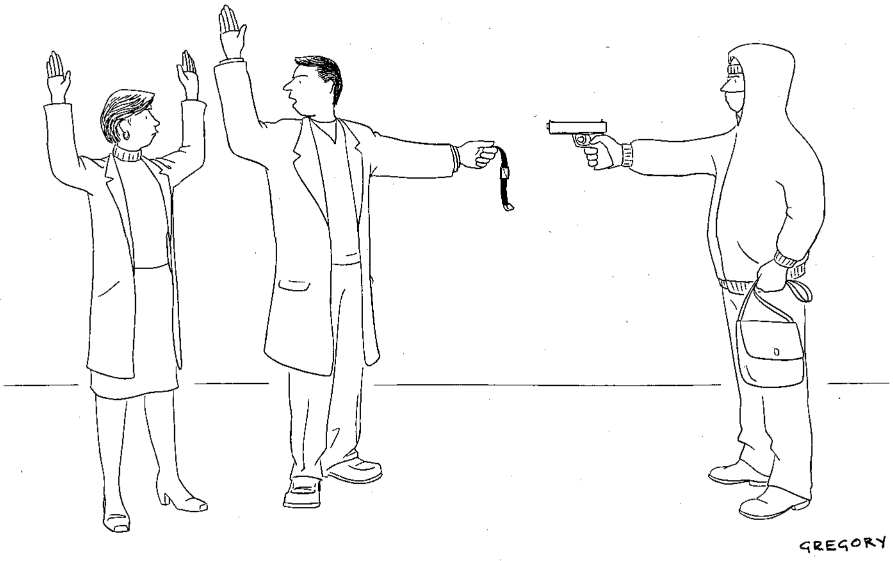
on the bar became part of the opening montage of "Saturday Night Live."

In 1989, the whole strange package came into the hands of a restaurateur named Christopher Chesnutt, who added Gaudiesque mosaic tiles to the awning and changed the name back to Teddy's, but kept the "El" in memory of the tapas bar. Chesnutt's lease was ending last year, and the tone of the Landmarks report was, for all the complications, encouragingly subdued. Around Christmas, as Cook finished the design for the Elghanayan house—an elegant, light-skinned, six-story, French-windowed version of a Tribeca warehouse—he felt fairly confident about the approaching first step in the Landmarks approval process, a Community Board 1 meeting on January 16th. "I knew people liked El Teddy's, but the crown and the mosaics obviously had nothing at all to do with the nineteenth-century architectural history that the landmark district was meant to preserve," he says. "If you tried to build it now, Landmarks wouldn't approve it. It was obvious that people had a lot of affection for El Teddy's, that it represents a time and space in the social evolution of Tribeca. But it happened, and we're moving on. Landmarks is about saving architectural history, not about saving some quirky commercial endeavor that makes people smile. I assumed that that would be it—that people would smile and move on."

There are conflicting accounts about what happened at the Community Board 1 meeting on January 16th—some people insist that the board was swept up by a passionate movement, à la Frank Capra, others that the emotion was already there—but everyone agrees that, whatever happened, Bruce Ehrmann was at the center of it. One simple way of describing Bruce Ehrmann is to say that if Saul Bellow had set out to create a New York real-estate man, Bruce Ehrmann is the one he would have made. He is voluble, excitable, eloquent, literate, and streetwise, wears Giorgio Armani suits beneath a Philip Guston stubbled head, and is a man of divided attentions, if not conscience. In his nighttime role, as the chairman of Community Board 1's Landmarks Committee, he is uniquely passionate about saving the character of Tribeca; in his daytime role, as a star salesman at Stribling, he is uniquely skilled at selling bits and pieces of it to people with the money to buy. If he is pressed about the tension between his two roles, he will say something along the lines of "It is a constant struggle, and the best way of protecting a neighborhood is to have people living there who have the means to protect it, and anyway there are as many styles of real-estate sales as there are of magazine reporting and I've been fortunate enough to represent developers whose projects I respect, and, O.K., I'm a conflicted Jew, there's another kind?" (On another occasion, brooding on the apparent contradiction, he was heard to say, "As a socialist back when, I always thought that these were conflicts we could examine *after* the Revolution.")

"Everyone was surprised by the nerve it struck," Bruce Ehrmann said of the Community Board meeting, over breakfast at Bubby's recently. "I was surprised by the nerve it struck in me. It was a visceral issue—who would know, who would care, after years of transformation and development and redevelopment and a neighborhood transformation the likes of which—and here was something so light and breezy and homey, disappearing for still one more buttoned-down construction cleanup. It was just a bit much for the people. El Teddy's tells me I'm in Tribeca. I go past the American Thread Building, past the park, and I see El Teddy's and I know I'm in Tribeca. It's a break with the street wall, true, and in the postmodernist architectural dispensation everyone is obsessed with the integrity of the street wall, but if you only have an unbroken street front, then you might as well be in Iowa, with wheat fields as far as you can see. El Teddy's isn't just an emblematic building; it helps create a kind of corporeal portal for the vista south. It's just that there's some felicity there. That's all. It is felicitous."





"God, I feel like such a tourist."

* * *

That night, Bruce Ehrmann offered a resolution in defense of El Teddy's, one perhaps uniquely passionate in the history of Community Board resolutions. It contained eight separate "whereas" clauses. Among them were that "WHEREAS the existing building in question is easily the most famous and one of the most felicitous in the Tribeca East Historic District" and "WHEREAS the building . . . is famous for its eclectic stucco façade, dazzling and even brilliant Pattern and Decoration Movement interpretation of the traditional Tribeca canopy, estimable Op Art window sculptures and legendary crown," and "WHEREAS if those qualities—and the love of the community itself—do not contribute more than any other factors to the meaning of an historic district, then this committee is at a loss to define what a contributing structure is." If all this was true, the document concluded, then nobody should be allowed to pull down El Teddy's. To everyone's amazement, and the new owner's mild shock, the resolution swept the Community Board, 25-8. "I like the margaritas, too," an exasperated Elghanayan was quoted as saying. "But it's just a bar."

No one can think of another landmarks case that is much like the fight for El Teddy's. Even Paul Selver, an experienced land-use lawyer whom Elghanayan has retained for the next round, has a hard time thinking of any. There was the case of the Dvořák House, which Beth Israel wanted to tear down in order to expand, even though the "New World Symphony" had been written there, and there is the case of a loft building on Broadway that was saved, in part, because it was thought to be the site of a famous photograph of Abe Lincoln taken by Mathew Brady. But both buildings already fit the definition of individual landmarks in the area. El Teddy's represents something else, a building that most people would agree doesn't qualify as a landmark but which the community the landmarks law presumably serves feels is crucial to its sense of community. The city has never designated individual businesses as landmarks—even the smaller Statue of Liberty on the Liberty Warehouse, at Sixty-fourth and Broadway, to take a parallel case, is unprotected. Some of the giant signs in Times Square *are* protected by landmarks law. "But what's protected isn't particular signs—it's signage," Selver says. "The giant smoke-breathing Camel's sign that stood there for so long was famous and well loved, but nobody thought you could keep it there eternally."

Part of the problem lies in the difference between what the Landmarks Preservation Commission means by a landmark and what New Yorkers mean by a landmark. The commission means a building; New Yorkers generally mean a

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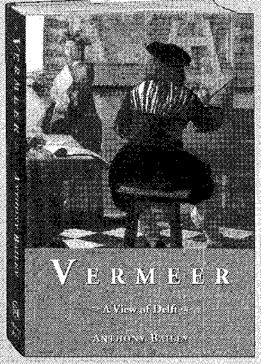

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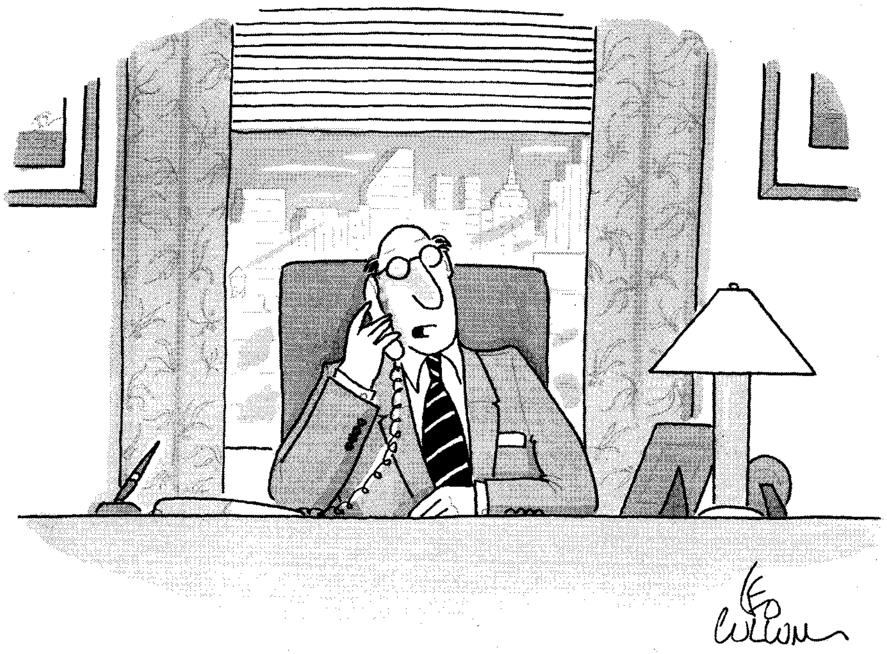
business inside a building and the sign outside the building that points to the business inside. Saving the building, even saving its façade, doesn't often or always have much to do with saving the landmark. The Scribner's bookstore on Fifth Avenue, for instance, has become a Benetton, and, though this is obviously better than losing the building, it is also not quite the same as saving the Scribner's. In other cities, the buildings that attract memories tend to get built for their own, or some state, purpose. The Eiffel Tower, built in order to be built, has been a radio mast, a giant Citroën billboard, a private concession, and a military lookout. In New York, the places of the heart are places that were, almost always, shaped in the first instance to the desire for short-term profit. A landmark's essence may be the sum of the blue margaritas that have been drunk there.

There is also a sense, at once weirder, deeper, and more local, in which the fight over the El Teddy's crown reflects a need to lodge signs and symbols in an almost abstract universe of their own. As it happens, I have kept in my office for years a photograph of my wife and me at El Teddy's in 1985. (Strictly speaking, it was El Internacional by then; the photograph was taken for one of those fetching-career-girl stories in a magazine at a time, long gone, when magazines still ran more fetching than kvetching career-girl stories.) It is late at night, and she is wearing a Chinese-style jacket and a short silk skirt and I am wearing a dinner jacket and grinning wolfishly at her while we share a margarita, and the fact that every single detail in this picture is a lie—the clothes were taken back as soon as the picture was shot, it was actually four in the afternoon, I have never worn a dinner jacket out on a date, we have never drunk margaritas, and we never went to El Teddy's, before or after—does not alter the extent of my affection for it. El Teddy's was a convenient place to project an image or fantasy of the life we would have had if we had had a life like that. This makes me, if not completely skeptical about the number of people who have been coming forward at Community Board 1 meetings, and in online chat groups, with fervent memories of El Teddy's, still largely skeptical about them. What most of these witnesses may be saying is that, like us, they intended to have those moments, and that the eradication of El Teddy's would be a way of tearing down the retrospective possibility of having them. New York has always been a place where it is possible to have memories without the experiences that conventionally precede them. It is not at all uncommon for people to refer knowingly to things or institutions that they never actually witnessed—as though there were a myth-kitty of common memories that people have a right



"That's not what you told my screener you wanted to talk about."

to draw on whether they had the original experience or not. (A young reporter in line at the Puff Daddy trial will say, "Hey, this is harder to get into than Studio 54!" or a young woman in a happy bar may announce, "This reminds me of Max's Kansas City!")

The open-to-all memory is a reflection of an essential part of New York life, which involves the nearness of diversion and the necessity of exhaustion: you pay too much money to live in close proximity to places where people can enjoy the kind of pleasures that you are too worn out from the overwork necessary to live in proximity to such places to enjoy. (In the six months since I returned to New York from Paris, for instance, I have never once been to an opera, a ballet, or, save for a matinée of "The Music Man," to the theatre. Yet if I read in the Sunday *Times* that the Metropolitan, the City Ballet, and the Music Box had all closed for lack of custom I would be outraged, and wonder why I was living in New York at all.) Such absences increase in our lives year by year, of course, through the force of work and exhaustion and, above all, children. But even in our salad days, when we are hopping in the garden, most of the lettuce goes untasted—even when we do our best to do New York, there always seems to be another New York, of piano players in cool bars at midnight and hard-rock bands in hot basements, not to mention blue margaritas in downtown bars, which we were going to do, and somehow didn't. There is a New York idiom, if not peculiar to the city then at least prevalent in it, that seems to capture this feeling. "Live around here?" people ask each other earnestly. The condition of New York is the condition of living around, and looking at all the outside "here"s on your way home.

Yet there is a compensatory condition of what you could only call signiness—a proliferation of signs that are not portals to pleasure but placeholders for experiences. The alternative universe of late-night piano players and punk clubs that we never experience is one that, in some way, we have experienced simply by virtue of living around here. Signiness is produced not only by signs in the literal sense, big bright things outside businesses, but by the whole commercial apparatus of hope: by club listings and restaurant reviews and concert posters and coming attractions and even menus found in the lobby. The knowledge that you can get crab-and-corn soup at four in the morning is some consolation for the noise of the trucks and buses on the avenue that keep you lying awake in bed all night. Having a photograph of yourself in clothes you did not wear drinking a drink you did not drink is not, in New York terms, really an exercise in nostalgia, which is memory without reference, but a kind of religious submission—the acceptance of histories that you have no firsthand reason to believe are true but that you are willing to take, and join, on faith.

The persistence of signiness is what is at stake in the El Teddy's battle. The crown of El Teddy's symbolizes New York not because it was on the credits of "Saturday Night Live"; it was on the credits of "Saturday Night Live" because it symbolizes the idea of New York that the opening scenes of "Saturday Night Live" exist to symbolize. The crown of El Teddy's is not a reminder of blue margaritas drunk; it is, or was, a permanent placeholder that freed you from the necessity of having to drink blue margaritas. New York is a place that promises experiences, and somehow replenishes the promises even as it reneges on the experiences. One sign of this replenishment is the manufacture of the blue margaritas of memory.

Several weeks ago, the Landmarks Commission looked at the Cook proposal in one of its regular Tuesday public hearings at its headquarters, at 100 Old Slip, and, after listening to all sides, diplomatically sent the proposal back to the architect and asked him, in effect, to explain why the restaurant should be torn down. An answer may come before the commission as soon as next week. Several downtown Solomons have suggested that a compromise may lie in either moving the crown to the top of some other building or incorporating some reference to the crown in the façade of the new building. The defenders of El Teddy's are not entirely opposed to this, even though they recognize that it would result in an odd mixture of Robert Moses and Proust—an emblem negotiated through a city bureaucracy pointing wistfully at the memory of a sign. It would, at least, be a symbolic victory. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

PARENTS VIE FOR TOP SCHOOL TURNDOWNS

BY BRUCE McCALL

A rejection letter from the *Byron-Shelley School* is probably the most prized among all New York independent-school turndowns—unsurprising, with B-S application forms sparking bidding wars at Sotheby's and interviews being so hard to obtain. (Gloria Vanderbilt is still waiting for hers.) But a nix from B-S is a no-lose situation for you: few parents and even fewer girls ultimately find the Byron-Shelley way their way. Even gym class is conducted in Latin; the nightly fund-raising calls soon begin to grate; the quasi-religious Black Velvet Headband ceremony, coming as it does in the third grade, seems precociously early. Then there's that all-Wall Street B-S board of directors, rumored to be ready to merge with Spence, strip the school's assets, auction off the real estate, and start all over with something called the New Arbitrage School.

Mixed feelings abound when the *Holdingpen* turndown arrives. On the one hand, your boy has been rejected by a school that carries the venerable motto "You buy their way in, they shoot their way out." On the other hand, there's the ambience—barred school-bus windows, goalie-masked faculty, a chess team called the Visigoths, graduation openly referred to as "parole." Is that all you'd hope for from a twenty-four-thousand-dollar-a-year (plus damage deposit) college-preparatory experience? Remember, tuition costs are calculated inversely from students' S.A.T. scores. Another caveat: forty-two per cent of the parent body can't accurately name their sons. In sum, weep not. A good military academy will cost less, and detox services are almost certain to be far less laissez-faire.

The black-bordered envelope from *Moholy-Nagy Academy* is cause for celebration in many a New York home. Progressive education has its limits, and Moholy-Nagy—with Esperanto as its official language, no regular hours, and no bathrooms—may somewhat overshoot them. M-N's policy of recruiting its teachers from the dregs of society needs *lots* more backup than that boilerplate "It nips trust in the bud" rationale. And you shouldn't forget the sandal-wearing downtown parent body, which last semester voted to ban recordings by Woody Guthrie because he's "a sell-out." In any event, given the rigid acceptance criteria, a Moholy-Nagy rejection has an air of inevitability about it. What child do you know who has never used a sidewalk?

ISTVAN BANYAI

Buck up! The frostily insincere letter of regret from the *Dovecote Christian School* is better than a yes from almost anywhere else. You've already been through the humiliating application process—parents viewed through two-way mirrors as they plead for interviews, little girls whisked away for delousing, the invasive family sexual-history questionnaire. And, anyway, Dovecote Christian's motto alone ("*We* Ask the Questions") should have tipped you off to a haughtiness that bars parents even from Parents' Night. Nor would your type-A fellow-parents unfailingly charm, viz., the junk-bond king who just copped a Presidential pardon for his homework-averse daughter.

Is it such a bummer to get bad news from a school where the students are addressed as "darling"? Be glad that *Barrymore* has passed on your little pride and joy. Competitive? The fifties entertainment blacklist started here, parent denouncing parent to squelch rival aspirants. There's undeniable glamour in a scholastic milieu so saturated in the performing arts that applicants must try out in the New Haven public-school system and even pre-K tots are required to have agents. But if embittered Barrymore parents' tales of required anti-paparazzi courses and notoriously round-heeled senior girls don't put you off, the image of eleven-year-olds throwing tantrums because they can't find their pictures on the wall at Sardi's should.

Nobody ever regretted their Dear John letter from *St. Modestus*. First, it's on the West Side. Second, "Mediocrity in All Things" on a blazer crest hardly incites school pride. And third, those "Fifty Per Cent Off if You Enroll Him Now!" St. Modestus handbills you keep finding tucked under your windshield wipers bespeak a school that may feel a mite insecure about its educational package. What St. Mode's offers has been hard to pin down ever since admissions was combined with maintenance, but the fact that the auditorium has been rented out as a night club and the headmaster post is rotated among the twelfth graders seems to indicate that rejected applicants aren't so much off the A-list as they are off the hook. ♦

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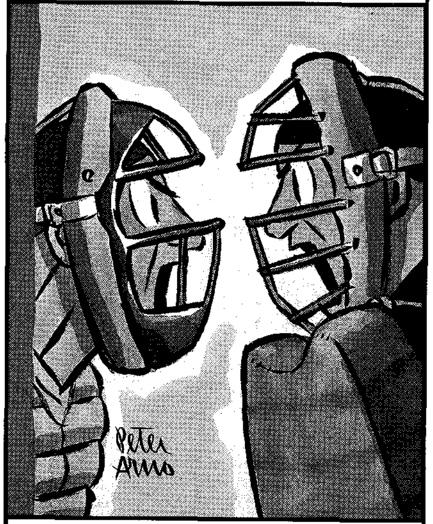

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OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

ONE YEAR LATER

The fashion system finds a new star.

BY JAMES COLLINS

The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Center, named for a Puerto Rican poet and nationalist, is situated on Suffolk Street, on Manhattan's Lower East Side. A dozen community cultural groups—Cine Huracán, Afro Brazil Arts—are housed in the building, which used to be Public School 160. The C.S.V. Center, as it's known, would seem to be an unlikely setting for a fashion show—a real Fashion Week fashion show, with buyers from Neiman Marcus and squads of photographers—but it is actually a perfectly predictable location: these days, a buyer from Neiman's would be disappointed if, during Fashion Week, she were not called upon to attend a show in a seedy neighborhood, at a venue named for a Puerto Rican poet and nationalist, although she, of course, would have no idea that's who he was.

So it happened that on a Sunday night in February, a little more than a year ago, the Lincoln Town Cars lined up on Suffolk Street. Their occupants had come to see the Fall 2000 collection of Miguel Adrover, a thirty-four-year-old Majorcan. The fashion crowd usually spurns Sunday-night events, but in this case the inconvenience only heightened the sense of anticipation, a certain amount of hardship being necessary for a satisfying reconnoitre of bohemia. Adrover had shown a line of clothes for the first time the previous September. That show had been attended by a small group of opinion leaders like the boutique owner Linda Dresner and the *Times* critic Cathy Horyn. Word soon spread that Adrover had talent. He also had an interesting story. He had not received training at a fashion school or worked for an established designer, so he was not the result of the usual young-designer production system. He spoke a colorful brand of English and lived in a grim basement apartment on East Third Street, where a circle of equally impoverished admirers gathered in the evenings to help him make his clothes. By February, Adrover's show had become the most highly anticipated event on that season's calendar.

The elements for a succès fou or a miserable dud were thus in place. Anna Wintour, the editor of *Vogue*, sat in the front row wearing dark glasses and looking bored. Adrover had allocated seats farther back to his peers. I sat next to a man with a pompadour who wore a glittery sweater with a sort of wing attached to it; he spoke French, and he smelled.

Just before the show began, traffic noises sounded through the loudspeakers. A bell tolled, and then a chamber piece for piano and strings came on, and the first model walked down the runway. She wore a long, high-necked navy dress in a big windowpane check. Close-fitting at the waist, the dress had a full skirt with large folds, like a napkin spread out and picked up in the middle. For half an hour, the different looks went by: skirts with ragged hems, scratched-denim pants, a wool plaid coat with a high velvet collar, an evening dress that looked like a beaded spiderweb, a blouse with puffy sleeves in a pretty floral print. The audience cheered when a model appeared wearing a Burberry raincoat turned inside out (displaying the company's signature plaid), and again when a model in a floor-length brown coat turned to show the back, which was made out of a Louis Vuitton leather purse, unstitched and flattened. A sharply tailored coat made out of old, stained mattress ticking caused a sensation. It provoked great amusement the next day, when everyone read in Horyn's review that Adrover had taken the ticking off a mattress owned by his neighbor, the late Quentin Crisp. At the end of the show, Adrover, wearing pin-striped pants and a sweatshirt, came out to wave briefly. He is tall, bearded, and lanky, and, with dark eyes and long brown hair, looks a bit like a medieval depiction of Christ. The crowd gave him a standing ovation.

Two days later, *Women's Wear Daily* put one of Adrover's coats on the cover, under

SABA

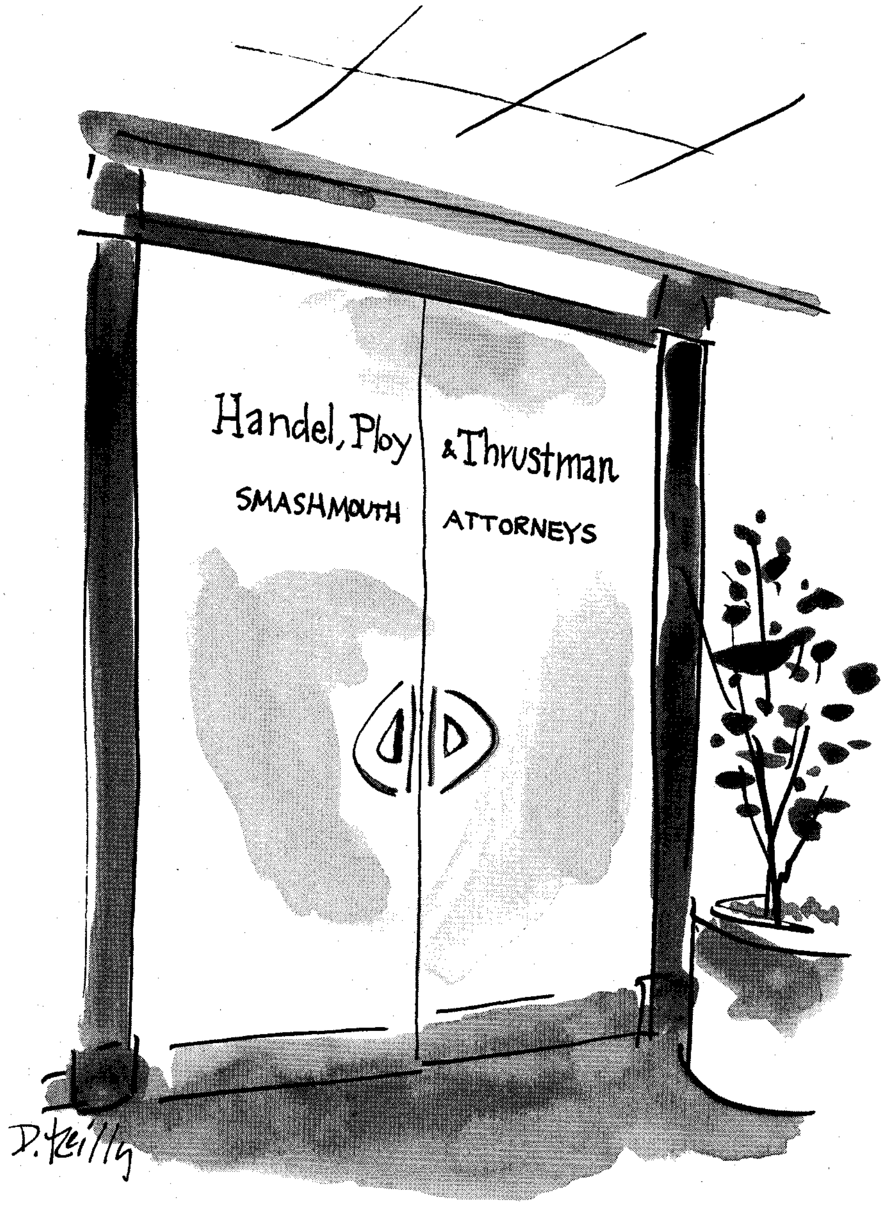
the headline "NEW YORK'S NEW STAR." Horyn, in the *Times*, called the clothes "brilliant" and "wonderful." Of the Quentin Crisp coat she wrote, "Having once absorbed the shocks of life as a mattress, what future delights would it hold as a chic town coat?" None, actually—Adrover never intended to sell that coat and, as he later told me, everyone who worked on it had developed a terrible rash.

In all fields where art meets commerce—fashion, publishing, entertainment, the art world, the music business—a system must be in place whereby talented people become known to those with influence, receive their backing, and are brought before the public. To those laboring in obscurity, these systems appear to be deeply flawed. But, as anyone who has ever worked in a publishing house reading the slush pile can attest, virtually every genius that can be discovered is discovered. There is a simple economic reason for that: just as chemical companies need new compounds, retailers and galleries and movie studios need new stars, so they devote themselves to research and development. By this time, the cultural nervous system has become so extensive and so acute that the cortex in New York will register stimuli produced as far away as, say, Dallas, Texas, the native homeland of Erykah Badu.

In addition to a gift, some combination of luck, cunning, egotism, spirit, charm, and drive is necessary for a creative person to achieve commercial success. One must be authentic but also practical. The rise of Miguel Adrover provides a good illustration of how the system works to capture the lightning bug of a new talent. But in his case, for a host of reasons, the R. & D. cycle was accelerated, and a new product and personality were brought to market with extraordinary speed.

The first time I met Adrover was

Miguel Adrover (kneeling), with Sebastián Pons, Pila and Gloria Sanchez, and Mei Zou. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.



right after his show last February, when I went backstage with Julie Gilhart, who is a vice-president for women's fashion at Barneys. In the fashion system, she is a crucial receptor. Barneys prides itself on developing newcomers, and to begin to sell a collection there is to take the first step on the way to becoming the next Prada. Backstage, Adrover wrapped his long arms around Gilhart. "I'm so happy for you," she said. He smiled and replied, "You always support me."

Just as it is important for a designer to impress someone like Gilhart, it is also important for her to impress him. Other buyers were buzzing around Adrover, too, offering their own hyperbolic congratulations.

Afterward, I walked with Gilhart to the subway. "You know, you sometimes see something and you just know it's going to work. That happened here," she said. "There was a quality to these clothes—the way they fit. That beautiful floral blouse is traditional, but he puts it with a black skirt with a slightly ragged hem and heels this long. It's really a flash of intuition more than any one particular thing. And the show had wit, too, making fun of big labels."

A couple of days later, I met Adrover again, in a Fifty-seventh Street showroom run by a woman named Marion Greenberg, a veteran fashion publicist. The shows themselves are only part of the action during Fashion Week. The real business is done when buyers meet with designers or their salespeople and place orders. Typically, many pieces of a collection never make it onto the runway, and many runway pieces, which may have theatrical value, are never bought for stores. Gilhart and a colleague came by Greenberg's to take a closer look at Adrover's line. They couldn't order anything, because Adrover had no one to produce and distribute his clothes, but they wanted to make a point: when you have a backer, they told him, you should sell your collection exclusively at Barneys.

Adrover was wearing a sweatshirt that said "Senior Challenge Rhode Island University 1990." He seemed simultaneously shy and charismatic; like a deer, he has a contained energy. His conversation does not strictly follow a logic matrix. Talking with the women from Barneys, he described his collection as "cheap modern clothes, like in somebody's closet." Gilhart fingered a few pieces. "These are beautiful," she said of some buttons. "They're bone," Adrover replied. "Two dollars each." Eventually, the buyers steered the discussion to the matter at hand. In the *WWD* story of a couple of days earlier, Adrover had been quoted as saying, "I'm dying to be in Bergdorf Goodman!" That bothered Gilhart. "I have to say that I was a little upset by the way you mentioned Bergdorf's in *Women's Wear*," she said quietly.

"Oh, I do not apologize," Adrover said simply. "You know, I was just saying something. Saying a store." Later, he added, "I need support from everyone. I am not eating for many days." Gilhart took this as her cue and said, "We'd really like to have you, because this is what we're good at. This is what we do—develop people." But Adrover wasn't really listening. He was absently looking at a coat. "I could do this plaid on everything," he said. "But I'll get bored, and the customer will get bored." Gilhart tried to turn this thought to her advantage: "That's what our concern is. If you're everywhere, then people get bored." Adrover finally seemed to get the picture. "Maybe if we make a deal," he said. "It's Barneys uptown and Jeffrey downtown." Adrover had never been inside either store.

The day that one of the most powerful women in the fashion business begged Adrover, a semiliterate immigrant who had never sold a pair of pants, to let her put his clothes in Barneys, the first stage in the rise of Miguel Adrover was complete: he had created demand. But what about creating supply? At that moment, each article of his clothing existed only in a single copy. He had no sources for fabric, no factory, and no financing.

Earlier that week, a middle-aged woman named Miriam Ruzow had read about Adrover's show, in *WWD*, while she was exercising on a treadmill in her Upper East Side apartment. Her husband, Stephen, is the former president of Donna Karan, International, and now runs a company called Pegasus Apparel Group, which has been making investments in underfinanced designers and has the ambition of becoming a fashion conglomerate. As Ruzow was leaving the house that day, his wife called to him from the treadmill. "She said that I ought to go after this guy on the cover," Ruzow said. "I told her, 'You don't go after someone the day he's on the cover of *Women's Wear*.' But then I read the story and saw the *Times*, and I realized I really had better try to get hold of Miguel."

When Julie Gilhart and her colleague left their meeting at Marion Greenberg's showroom, they bumped into Ruzow in the corridor. Ruzow, who has white hair and was wearing a dark suit, had come up in the elevator with Jason Weisenfeld, who was then a colleague of Gilhart's from Barneys. When Ruzow went inside, Weisenfeld cocked his head toward the doorway and then rubbed his fingers and thumb together. Ruzow had come with an offer to back Adrover. "I remember that man coming with the suit," Adrover told me later. "Someone very straight, for business. It was kind of like a freakout."

A month later, I visited Adrover in his East Village apartment. To get there, I walked through a dark, narrow hall with a filthy floor, which seemed like a passageway in a coal mine. He had cancelled several appointments at the last minute, not out of self-importance, it seemed, but as a result of disorganization and a pre-industrial notion that if he didn't really feel like doing something at a particular moment he didn't have to. His apartment had two rooms. The floor of one was entirely covered by a couple of mattresses; the other was the kitchen. In fact, the scene was a bit contrived, for by this time Adrover had moved into a brand-new place on the Bowery. But the basement apartment had become the magic cave of the Adrover story, so I, of course, insisted on seeing it, and he expected that I would want to.

Adrover was wearing sweat clothes again, this time with "Bristol Township P.D." printed on them. He seemed guarded, looking around a little furtively. I asked him how long he had been interested in fashion. "I have never been interested in fashion," he answered flatly. "A lot of people who love clothes don't feel connected to that."

The number of fashion designers who have ever admitted to being interested in fashion is exactly zero, but Adrover may have meant what he said. Sitting with us in the kitchen was a young woman named Jennefer Hoffmann. She is a painter from Canada who became friends with Adrover several years ago and was acting as his aide-de-camp; she later became the head of his public-relations operation. Hoffmann has a quiet manner and an open face, and it is hard to imagine her being a party to anything tainted with cynicism. Hoffmann said to Adrover, "I respect your ability to do a business deal. Me, personally, I would never have been able to mix business and art."

He answered, "This way, you're growing up a lot. It's good for you as a human being, when you can combine the creative side and the business side. Money doesn't have a heart. But we've got to be realistic. Without the fucking money you cannot live."

Adrover's comments and demeanor are not those of a person who has focussed like a laser on making it. He is a driftier figure, as his life story suggests. He grew up in a tiny village on Majorca, where his parents run an almond farm and where he first saw television at the age of nine. As a teen-ager, he was the one kid in the community who was always into the latest music and clothes—punk, New Romantic, country-and-Western. He left school at about twelve and worked on his family's farm, and after serving in the Army in his late teens he ran a bar in Palma, the capital of Majorca. He went to London in the winters and worked cleaning Pakistani hotels. Then, in 1991, when he was twenty-five, he came to New York. He and a friend began making T-shirts for themselves. They would silk-screen them by hand and perhaps stitch on a collar from another shirt. Soon, friends were asking for them. They opened a shop in the East Village called Horn, which became a cynosure for artists and designers.

One of the influential creative people whom Adrover knew is Sebastián Pons, a designer who grew up in a neighboring village on Majorca. Pons, who is twenty-eight, remembers Adrover from childhood as "a really eccentric guy with funny hair being really happy and really friendly." Pons had been headed for work on the almond farms, but when he was nineteen he won a scholarship to study fashion in London. In 1994, while Pons was still in school, he came to New York to find a designer to apprentice with during the summer. "I walked around Fashion Avenue and said, 'This is hell,' " he recalled. "So I started to work for Miguel in his basement. We'd look around in the garbage outside sweatshops and find remnants and patch them together. We didn't have any money, but we had the passion."

While earning a master's degree, Pons started working for Alexander McQueen, the fanciful English design star who had just been hired to run the house of Givenchy. Adrover got to know McQueen through Pons, and occasionally helped prepare his shows. When McQueen visited New York, Adrover met his friend Marion Greenberg, the fashion publicist. And when Adrover decided to do a collection, Greenberg, working for free, called up some buyers and critics on his behalf. They were the people who started the talk about Adrover which brought all those Lincoln Town Cars down to Suffolk Street last February.

After helping Adrover with his first two shows, Pons quit the job with McQueen to work for his neophyte friend full time. Pons has had ten years more than Adrover to develop his expertise formally. "But I keep my knowledge inside," Pons said. "I like to see Miguel perform. I don't want to say, 'You don't twist it that way.' I'm learning from him, even though he's self-taught.

"These are true clothes," he went on. "It's easy to do crazy stuff. It's difficult to do something new but classic, something a woman feels comfortable in."

Adrover may have his street credentials, but he is not interested in being perverse. "My clothes is for selling, not for Halloween," he told me. "I'd like people to be wearing my clothes every day." The Louis Vuitton and Quentin Crisp mattress-ticking coats made amusing and attention-getting jests, but they were only for the runway.

This pragmatism is one of the things that Steve Ruzow liked about Adrover. "You rarely see a designer get such a good critical reception and also such a good reception from the retailers," Ruzow told me. When he met with Adrover, he proposed that Pegasus enter into a partnership with him and provide him with financing as well as with help in the non-design areas of the business—production, sales, payroll, and so on. A month passed before Adrover called Ruzow back.

A meeting was set up. Adrover, Pons, and Hoffmann sat down with Ruzow and two other men from Pegasus in a conference room at Rockefeller Center. Hoffmann had spruced up a bit, but Adrover and Pons wore their everyday clothes, which tend to be jeans that ride down below the underpants line. "It was one of those occasions when you say to yourself, 'O.K., I'm really going to have to keep my face on,'" Hoffmann said. The Pegasus executives, in suits, made a straightforward presentation, and the meeting ended cordially. Outside, Adrover, Hoffmann, and Pons shot off down Sixth Avenue in a wild run, and when they turned the corner they embraced each other and cried.

Rockefeller Center is not as far from the Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Center as one might think. Some salaryman from the fifty-first floor probably lives next door. Certainly, plenty of executives in the fashion industry deal with ponytailed designers regularly and consider themselves au courant as a result. But the daily experiences of someone sitting around in a basement scratching denim with sandpaper do accrete into a world view significantly different from that of someone who gives PowerPoint presentations.

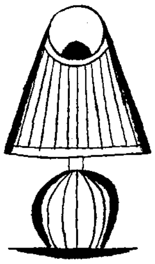
Neither Adrover nor Hoffmann had ever dealt with an attorney, so Hoffmann called a friend in Canada, a mergers and acquisitions lawyer named Dwight Gomes, for advice. He ended up representing Adrover during two months of sometimes difficult negotiations. ("All this language," Adrover said to me. "'Going public.' What the fuck is 'going public'?" "And 'claw back,'" Hoffmann chimed in. "What's 'claw back'?")

Adrover nearly quit the negotiations on several occasions. One contentious issue was licensing—whether Adrover would put his name on any merchandise besides clothes—and some confusion on this point still seems to exist. "There are obvious brand extensions with shoes and handbags," Ruzow told me. "And Miguel has mentioned doing a men's line eventually." When I asked Adrover about all this, he said, "No, I don't want to do a men's line now. No, I do not do handbags." He has, however, collaborated with a shoe designer and will begin to sell shoes next season.

Even more important to Adrover was the question of "creative control." A designer may have the freedom to create any sketch he wants, but a lot can happen to his conception as the article of clothing is specified for production and manufactured. Unlike many designers, Adrover has the right to approve fabrics, factories, and everyone who works in his studio. He is very pleased with the deal he got. "The money people don't see the collection until the runway," he told me.

Before Adrover signed the deal, he insisted that Pegasus make three of his designs, so that he could evaluate the quality of their production. One of these was the long, draped windowpane dress that opened his show. Louis Praino, who was then Pegasus's head of production, said, "It is beautiful. And it is one of the most difficult things I have ever produced. That's one piece of fabric." Adrover was satisfied with the work on all the samples, especially the dress. "I couldn't make it again myself," he said.

Adrover and Pegasus reached an agreement late on the night of Good Friday. Then Ruzow made what Praino called "a very gutsy move." He wanted to take advantage of the excitement Adrover had generated, so he announced that he would produce the fall line in three and a half months. The problem was that the fabrics Adrover had used were from old bolts of cloth he had scrounged up around town; the windowpane dress was made of old upholstery fabric. In the usual sequence, a manufacturer spends weeks finding sources for fabrics before a fashion show takes place, so it is ready to start making the clothes as soon as stores place their orders. In Adrover's case, there was no fabric left over for manufacturing, so Pegasus had to start from scratch. It took swatches to mills in Italy and hurried to have the fabrics re-created. The line consisted of thirty-six pieces, and on average the factory would produce a hundred and twenty units of each.



Once the decision to manufacture a fall line had been made, buyers came to place orders. Gilhart had won her battle: Barneys would be the only big store in New York to carry Adrover. One day in June she and some younger buyers went to Greenberg's showroom. Ruzow was there, wearing a black Lacoste shirt and dark trousers. "We're doing this blouse at four hundred, and the tuxedo pants are four ninety-five," he said. "I loved the long coat. I'm not just a business guy, see?" Gilhart sat next to Ruzow, looking at pictures and sketches. "I'm so excited about the prices, because people can get an outfit for less than a thousand," Ruzow continued.

Barneys placed its final order a couple of days later. I asked Gilhart about the thinking behind the decisions. She thought Adrover's signature was the floral silk blouse paired with a black skirt whose hem was uneven. "It's understated but really strong," she said. "There have been a couple of seasons when no one has been wearing blouses. It's been all sweaters. Now blouses are coming back, but there has to be something to them. A girl who would buy a vintage blouse might buy an Adrover." Gilhart told me that Barneys expected to sell perhaps a dozen of the big windowpane dresses, which will cost twenty-seven hundred and seventy-five dollars. Only three of the six Barneys stores (or "doors," in retailspeak) will carry Adrover—New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

In July, I visited Adrover at his spacious new studio on the Bowery, in an old loft building in the lighting district. "Going from no company to a big company is really hard," he said. "Now the basement seems so far away. It's responsibility now. Sometimes I don't know where to put my head." Adrover hired many members of the basement contingent: Hoffmann, Pons, Mei Zou, a pattern-maker, and two sisters, Gloria and Pila Sanchez, who have striking deep-set eyes and long noses. They do office work, and Gloria is also the fit model. They are joined by six tailors, who sit at their machines along an exposed-brick wall. These men are longtime professionals, and they give the studio a purposeful tone. Adrover's other employees include a sales manager, a public-relations assistant, and two cutters. The studio takes up the building's first two floors, and Adrover's new apartment is on the third.

Adrover was altering a blue-and-yellow plaid shirt that Pons had just bought on the street for ten dollars. He was sewing folds in the front. I watched his long fingers hold the fabric and pull the needle and thread; they looked slinky and graceful. "It's an oversized shirt, and I'm trying to give it shape," he said. When he folded the fabric over, he distorted the check pattern, an effect he said he liked. A couple of weeks later, the entire back looked like a jumbled plaid quilt. "To mass-produce the sewing is impossible," Adrover said. "In the East Village, that's what we used to do. We would take something and alter it." He said it was important to have projects like this. "There isn't a sketch or a pattern, just a lot of time experimenting. This I do for myself."

On one of the days that I visited, Simon Doonan, a twinkling, diminutive Englishman, who designs the windows at Barneys, arrived at the studio to discuss the windows he would do for Adrover. He wore a shirt with a small floral print. For a designer, getting windows at a store like Barneys is a very concrete expression of currency and success. Doonan, Adrover, Hoffmann, and Gary Nelson, Adrover's executive vice-president for sales, sat at a table on the unfinished second floor.

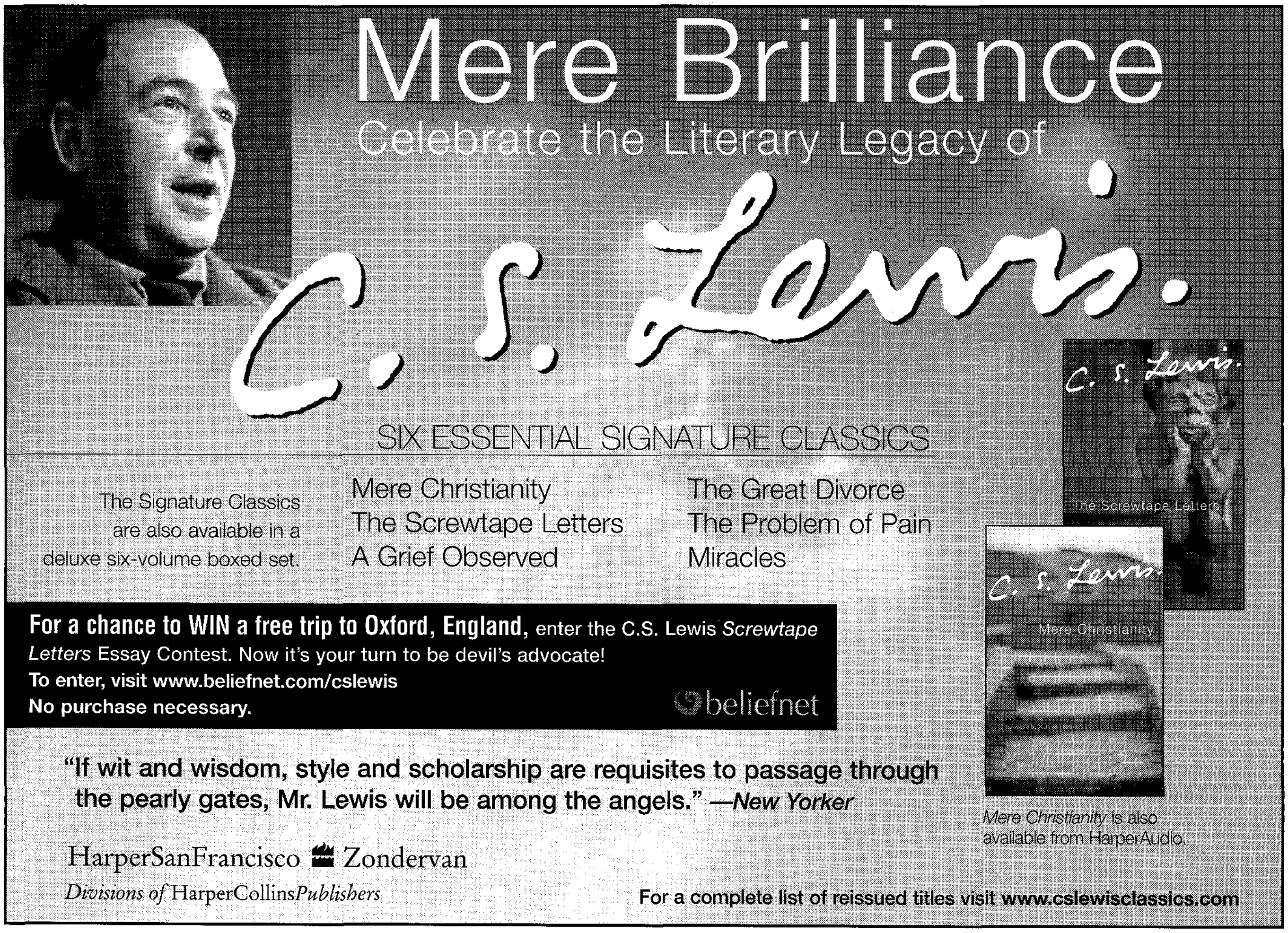
"It's important that we launch windows that feel right to you," Doonan said. "We could even have no merchandise in the window and put garbage on the floor."

"I'm not really liking conceptual things," Adrover responded. "I want to see the clothes. I'm really proud of the way the clothes are done."

Doonan drew three rectangles on a piece of paper.

"There are three windows on Madison," he said. "In the first one you might put two outfits. Then three and then one, perhaps. With certain designers we can't just put their clothes in the window, people like Comme des Garçons, Martin Margiela, Yohji Yamamoto; we have to understand their aesthetic."

He went on, "I called Continental Airlines recently and asked for two thousand airsickness bags. There are a lot of designers that would work with. If I put that with him"—he nodded toward Adrover—"he's going to ask, 'What has that got to do with me?' We took old refrigerators and put Prada accessories in them, and Prada was happy. Now, if you ask, 'Can we put six hundred



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cubic feet of mud in the window,' I'll say, 'Sorry, honey.' So—I came today so that you could tell me about your obsessions."

"I like horses," Adrover said. "And old wood libraries." This quieted Doonan for a moment.

"Do you want to show any of the pieces that aren't in production?" Nelson asked.

"Yes," Doonan said. "We could maybe elevate the showpieces. Our customers love to see esoteric little fashion moments." Then he turned back to Adrover. "When you say 'libraries,' are you attracted to old wood or books?"

"I like books," Adrover said. "And old wood. I'd like to take the fabric from the flowered suits I did and do it in the background, with the background all the same."

"That would be great," Doonan said. "We can scan it into the computer." Then he asked, "What kind of books does your woman read?"

"Encyclopedias," Adrover answered. "Nothing that personal. It's a window. Something general." Doonan noted this down.

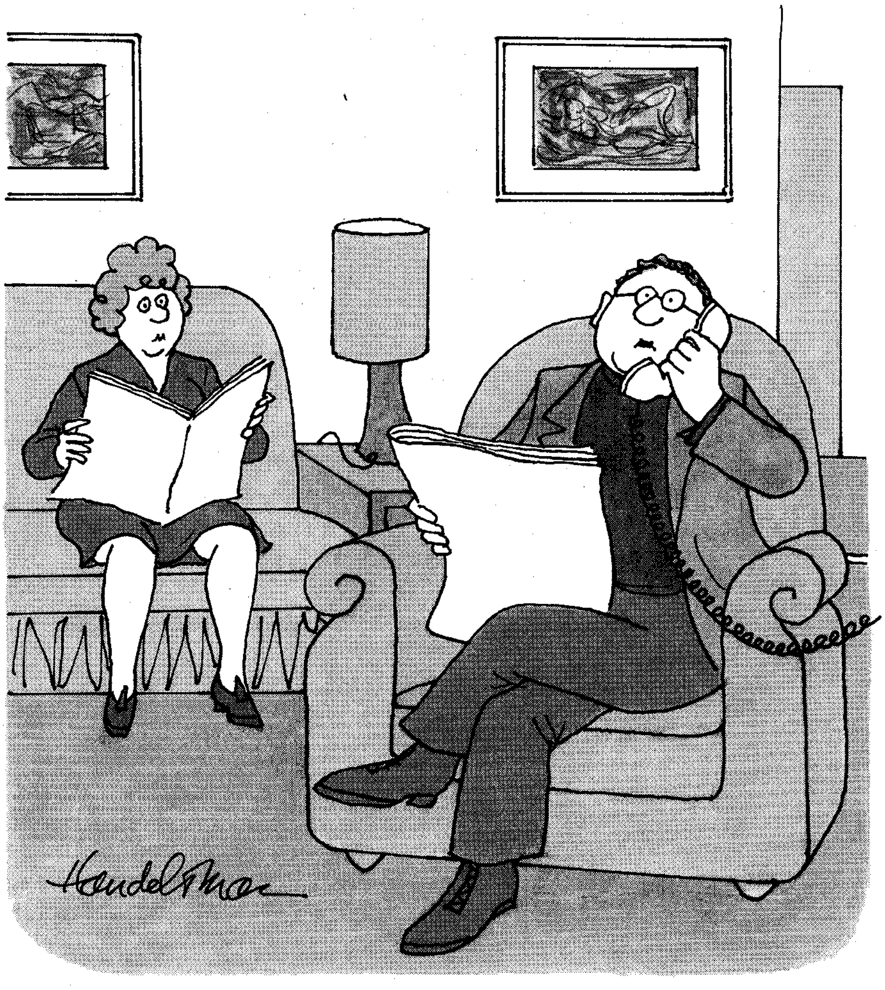
Tension arose during the meeting over the question of when Adrover's windows would be installed. The Adrover people had understood that all three women's-fashion windows would be devoted to him during September Fashion Week. Doonan tried gently to deflate this expectation.

"You see, there's a lot going on during Fashion Week," he said. "You really ought to be thinking about what's best for you in terms of when the clothes will be delivered to the store." There were some awkward pauses, and hesitant advances by the Adrover side.

"I hate to say that Miguel is more important than other designers—" Hoffmann said.

"You should, you're my P.R.!" Adrover cut in.

"We have to be very careful," Doonan said. "We only have three windows."



"Not too bad, except that my heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk. And you? Are you O.K.?"

Adrover and his cohorts were dismayed, but they allowed themselves only the most timid display of that sentiment.

"No, I agree," Doonan said silkily. "Julie's crazy about you, and we'll finesse something that's mutually agreeable."

There the issue was temporarily laid to rest, and Doonan and Adrover started talking shop. "Windows are a very disposable form of expression," Doonan said. "Some are good and some are shitty. I'm like an old prostitute. Sometimes I give a good blow job, sometimes I don't."

Adrover mused about his own window work. "I think I did good windows for my shop downtown. I'd buy an eel and put it in a tank and put the girl there." He derided some of the windows in the stores around town. "Sometimes I see them and the clothes are all wrinkled."

"I hate that," Doonan said.

A couple of months after this meeting, on a September night, Adrover drove in from Kennedy Airport with his mother, his brother, Sebastián Pons's mother, an old friend from Majorca named Cathy, and a cousin. Adrover's mother had never left Majorca before, and he had not seen her in two years. Their first stop was Sixty-first Street and Madison Avenue, to look at the windows of Barneys, all three of which now had Adrover's clothes in them. He had not seen them yet. Hoffmann had given Doonan a swatch of the floral fabric to be scanned, but there had been no more discussion. So they were surprised to find, when they reached Barneys that night, that the back walls and floors of the three windows that held Adrover's clothes were entirely covered with enlarged pages from a catalogue of pills.

"I was amazed when I saw the windows," Adrover told me. (It turned out that Adrover's clothes had shipped so late that Doonan decided to leave the backdrops from the previous week, when the windows showcased Yohji Yamamoto.) "It was good for my mom to see my name in the windows. But it doesn't really mean much. It means what it is. My mom liked it."

It is now more than a year since Adrover's show at the C.S.V. Center. The offices on the Bowery are finished, and when you arrive there efficient young women inquire about the reason for your visit. In September, to much acclaim, Adrover showed his Spring 2001 line, which featured a military look. The clothes will be available in thirty-six stores in the United States and thirty in Europe and the Far East. Then came the Fall 2001 show, held on a Sunday night in February. This time, he chose the old Essex Street Market as his venue. In some respects, the show did not go well, and Adrover received a lesson in how the fashion worm turns.

On this cold night, the scene on Essex Street was unpleasant. A crowd of people six or seven deep lined the block, standing behind metal barriers. Only one door was open to allow entry, and cries of "Don't push!" and "You're crushing me!" could be heard. A woman talked into her cell phone to a friend who was elsewhere in the crowd. A number of crashers had shown up, I later learned, but the people who were angriest were photographers and others who looked like media professionals. They weren't fans in search of a mystical fashion moment; they had come because they had jobs to do. Anna Wintour arrived at nine o'clock, saw the crowd, and left; the failure to part the seas for her was seen as a shocking lapse in Fashion Week protocol.

Inside, incense perfumed the air and dusty canvas hung from the ceiling, transforming the space into an enormous tent (an ironic comment on the tents uptown, in Bryant Park?). Adrover had travelled to Luxor in recent months, and the show had an Egyptian theme. Egyptian music played while the models, unconventional-looking as always with Adrover, walked along the runway wearing variations of caftans and burnooses. One floor-length cloak seemed to have been woven of ribbons of colored fabric. Some of the clothes looked dirty, and I was reminded of a time on the street when Adrover had pointed to a homeless man's grimy T-shirt and told me he would like to make some cloth that looked like that. For this show, he was further inspired by the soiled clothing he had seen in Egypt. "They are poor people," he told me. "Much poorer than I ever was." To give the clothes the appearance he wanted, Adrover put them in the Nile and left them there for a day.

In a mishap, a black sheep that was supposed to accompany a model stumbled off the runway and had to be rescued by Ruzow. More important, the show got some bad reviews, a first for Adrover. Most notable of the pans was the one in the *Times*, by Cathy Horyn. "Those fifteen minutes of fame that Andy Warhol promised everyone now seem like an eternity in an age gone stale with hype and mediocrity," she wrote. "One . . . had the feeling that [Adrover's] audience had come to inspect the emperor's new clothes." A year earlier, Horyn had started all the hype, with her review and a long follow-up story in which she called Adrover "brilliant" and "the most talked-about newcomer since—well, since nobody can recall."

Other critics liked the show, and so did Gilhart. "I thought the clothes were beautiful," she said. Adrover, speaking from his parents' home on Majorca, where he had gone after Fashion Week, told me, "For clothes, I think this is the best show we have done." He said that he had just watched a video of the show with some Arab men who work for his father. "They were crying," he said. "It was so real for them. That was one of the best compliments I've gotten." But Arab almond pickers don't set the agenda for the fashion world, and the over-all reaction seems to have been impatience. People were quick to attribute the show's problems to arrogance rather than to poor organization, and they appeared almost annoyed that Adrover would remain true to his unconventional image instead of treating it like a gimmick to be discarded once it had brought him the desired attention. Now the fashion establishment seemed to be saying to him, "Sure, you can drag us down to some street named for one of the seven kingdoms of England. That's piquant. Just don't push it."

Adrover is in the curious position of seeing his reputation soar and falter before the public has even had a chance to vote. His first collection arrived in stores quite late last fall. It sold extremely well, but this was not a real test of his appeal to customers, especially since, as Gilhart told me, with all the media attention and the small number of units, the first collection was certain to be a success. The clothes for the spring line have just shipped. She said, "In the retail reality world, it all boils down to one question: 'Did you sell it?' We still don't know." ♦

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PROFILES

BEEN HERE AND GONE

How August Wilson brought a century of black American culture to the stage.

BY JOHN LAHR

If anybody asks you who sang this song
Tell 'em
It was little Jimmy Rushing,
He's been here and gone.

The playwright August Wilson lives in a leafy, genteel part of Seattle intended by the city's founding fathers to be the site of the state capitol, and so named Capitol Hill. He moved here in 1994, with Constanza Romero, a Colombian-born costume designer who is now his third wife, and they share a rambling turn-of-the-century house with Azula, their three-year-old daughter. Azula has her father's ear and number, as well as total control of the living room, which, apart from a jukebox and a piano—props from Wilson's productions—hasn't a stick of adult furniture. Wilson, who doesn't drive, is more interested in the inner terrain than the external one; writing, he says, "is for me like walking down the landscape of the self. . . . You find false trails, roads closed for repairs, impregnable fortresses, scouts, armies of memory, and impossible cartography."

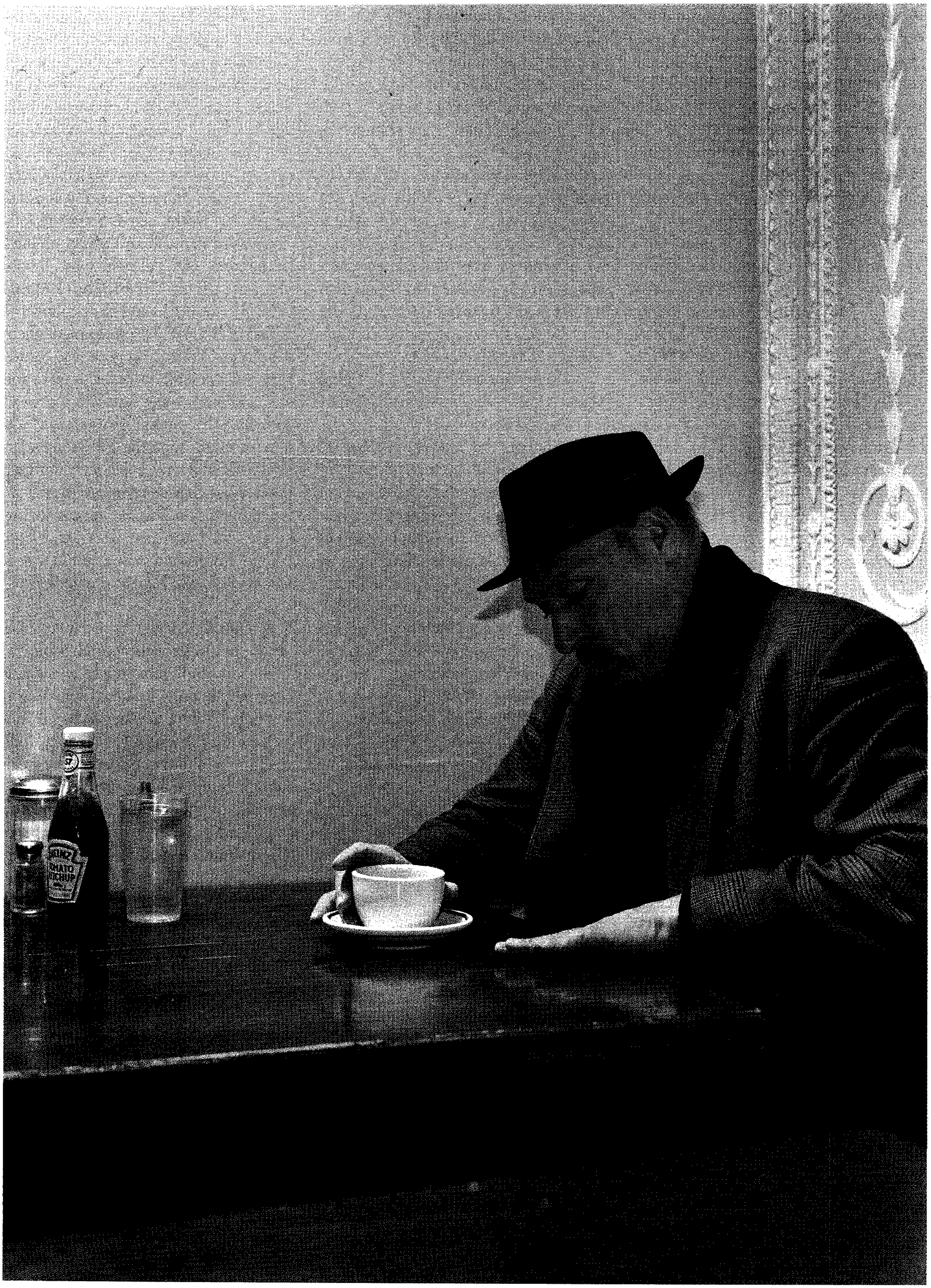
Wilson does most of his pathfinding below the living room, in a low-ceilinged basement, lit by neon bars, where he goes to sneak cigarettes, listen to records, and wait for his characters to arrive. He writes standing up, at a high, cluttered pine accounting desk, where he can prop his legal pad and transfer his jottings to a laptop computer. Pinned on a bulletin board, just beside where he stands to write, are two quotations, as bold as street signs: "TAKE IT TO THE MOON" (Frank Gehry) and "DON'T BE AFRAID. JUST PLAY THE MUSIC" (Charlie Parker). When Wilson looks up from his desk, at the dingy wall with its labyrinth of water pipes, he sees honorary degrees from the University of Pittsburgh, his home town, and from Yale, where his career as a playwright began, in 1982—just two of twenty-three he has accumulated so far, which is not bad for a fifty-five-year-old writer who quit school when he was fifteen.

For years, about two steps behind Wilson's writing table, an Everlast punching bag was suspended from the ceiling. When Wilson was in full flow and the dialogue was popping, he'd stop, pivot, throw a barrage of punches at the bag, then turn back to the work. Recently, however, during a particularly vigorous rewrite of his new play, "King Hedley II," which opens on Broadway this month, Wilson knocked the bag and its ceiling hook down, and it now rests mournfully in the corner. Wilson has a retired boxer's heft—thick neck, square shoulders, wide chest—and a stomach whose amplitude is emphasized by suspenders that bracket his belly like parentheses. Wilson is the product of a mixed marriage, but, he says, "the culture I learned in my mother's household was black." He has a handsome face that is dominated by a wide forehead and a concentrated gaze. He exudes a very specific sense of gravity. He gives away nothing at first, or even second, glance. But when his guard is down, and especially when he's telling a story, you feel what his wife calls "the sizzle."

Wilson, who was originally named Frederick August Kittel, after his German father, says that his model for manhood—"the first male image that I carry"—is not his father but an old family friend, "the brilliant Hall of Fame prizefighter" Charley Burley. Archie Moore called Burley the best fighter he'd ever faced, and Sugar Ray Robinson refused to box him, but after his glory days as a pugilist were over Burley became a garbageman in Pittsburgh and lived across the street from the impressionable young Wilson. In Burley's Friday-night regalia—hundred-dollar Stetson, cashmere coat, yam-colored Florsheim shoes—Wilson saw something iconic. Burley was one of those black men, Wilson writes, who "elevated their presence into an art. They were bad. If only in an abstract of style."

Burley was known as "the uncrowned champion"; Wilson is known as "the heavyweight champion"—a nickname given to him by the director Marion McClinton, who is staging "King Hedley II." McClinton explains, "It's August's language—the rhythm of hurt, the rhythm of pain, the rhythm of ecstasy, the rhythm of family—which sets him apart and is why we call him the heavyweight champion." Between 1959, when Lorraine Hansberry had a hit with "A Raisin in the Sun," and 1984, when Wilson made his sensational breakthrough with "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," a play about black musicians' struggle with their white bosses in the twenties, the number of African-American plays to succeed on Broadway was zero. (There were, of course, many other black playwrights during this time—Amiri Baraka, Ron Milner, Phillip Hayes Dean, Richard Wesley, and Ed Bullins, among them—who won critical praise and a coterie following.) "Ma Rainey" ran for ten months. Almost immediately, Hollywood came calling, mostly with offers for bio-pics of Louis Armstrong, Muhammad Ali, and the like; Wilson wasn't tempted. He asked the Hollywood nabobs why so many black playwrights had written only one play. "I go, 'Where is Lonne Elder? Where is Joseph Walker?' They go, 'They're in Hollywood.' And I go, 'Oh, I see,'" he says. "I wanted to have a career in the theatre."

Wilson's success also triggered what McClinton calls "one of the more major American theatrical revolutions." His audience appeal almost single-handedly broke down the wall for other black artists, many of whom would not otherwise be working in the mainstream. His plays were showcases for an array of first-rate performers, such as Charles S. Dutton, Samuel L. Jackson, Courtney Vance, Angela Bassett, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, and Laurence Fishburne. And the opportunities for African-American playwrights also increased. "What's happened since 1984 has been incredible," McClin-



August Wilson at the Café Edison, February 13, 2001: He gives away nothing at first, or even second, glance, but when his guard is down, and especially when he's telling a story, you feel what his wife calls "the sizzle." Photograph by Dana Lixenberg.

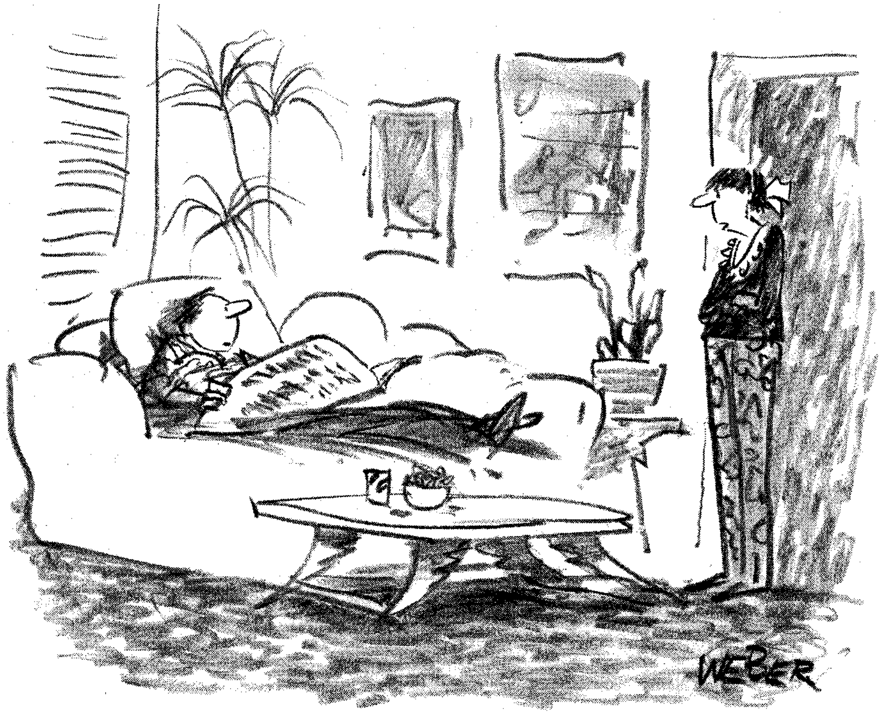
ton says. "A lot of black writers had doors opened to them basically because August knocked them open. So then you start seeing Kia Corthron, Suzan-Lori Parks, Keith Glover, Robert Alexander, Lynn Nottage, Sam Kelley, Carlisle Brown, Charles Smith, Michael Henry Brown—I could keep going. American theatre now looks toward African-Americans as viable members."

Wilson followed "Ma Rainey" with six critically acclaimed plays in a row—"Fences" (1987; Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award), "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" (1988), "The Piano Lesson" (1990; Pulitzer Prize), "Two Trains Running" (1992), "Seven Guitars" (1996), and "Jitney" (2000). He actually had drafts of "Fences" and "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" in his trunk before "Ma Rainey" made it to Broadway, and sometime after the success of that play, he has said, it dawned on him that each play he'd written so far was "trying to focus on what I felt were the most important issues confronting black Americans for that decade." Wilson gave himself a mission: to continue to chronicle, decade by decade, the "dazed and dazzling" rapport of African-Americans with the twentieth century. "King Hedley II" is set in the nineteen-eighties, which leaves only the first and last decades of the century to be written. The plays form a kind of fever chart of the trauma of slavery. Their historical trajectory takes African-Americans through their transition from property to personhood ("Joe Turner's Come and Gone"); their struggle for power in urban life ("Ma Rainey"); their dilemma over whether to embrace or deny their slave past ("The Piano Lesson"); the broken promise of first-class citizenship after the Second World War ("Seven Guitars"); their fraught adaptation to bourgeois values ("Fences"); stagnancy in the midst of Black Power militancy ("Two Trains Running"); and their historical and financial disenfranchisement during the economic boom ("Jitney" and "King Hedley II").

"The average struggling non-morbid Negro is the best-kept secret in America," Zora Neale Hurston wrote in 1950. Wilson has put that man—his songs, his idiom, his superstitions, his folly, and his courage—on the stage. His plays are not talking textbooks; they paint the big picture indirectly, from the little incidents of daily life. "People can be slave-ships in shoes," Hurston said. Wilson's characters are shackled together by something greater than poverty; their bondage is to the caprices of history. "We's the leftovers," Toledo, the piano player and only literate member of Ma Rainey's band, tells the other musicians. "The white man knows you just a leftover. 'Cause he the one who done the eating and he know what he done ate. But we don't know that we been took and made history out of."

Wilson's work is a conscious answer to James Baldwin's call for "a profound articulation of the Black Tradition." He says he wanted to demonstrate that black American culture "was capable of sustaining you, so that when you left your father's or your mother's house you didn't go into the world naked. You were fully clothed in manners and a way of life." In the past, playwrights such as Dubose Heyward, Paul Green, and Eugene O'Neill made blacks and black culture the subject of drama; Wilson has made them the object. "When you go to the dictionary and you look up 'black,' it gives you these definitions that say, 'Affected by an undesirable condition,'" Wilson says. "You start thinking something's wrong with black. When white people say, 'I don't see color,' what they're saying is 'You're affected by this undesirable condition, but I'll pretend I don't see that.' And I go, 'No, *see* my color. Look at me. I'm not ashamed of who I am and what I am.' "

Wilson's characters often scrabble desperately, sometimes foolishly, for an opportunity that rarely comes. But when opportunity knocked for Wilson he seized it with a vengeance. He has tried to live his writing life by the Buddhist motto "You're entitled to the work but not the reward"; nevertheless, he has become a very rich man—in 1990, he was the most produced American playwright—and he is only getting richer. After "Seven Guitars," he and his co-producer, Ben Mordecai, formed a joint venture called Sageworks, which allows Wilson to exercise unusual control over the destiny of his plays—and also to take both a writer's and a producer's share of their profits. A Wilson play has a gestation period like no other in the history of American theatre, and no other major playwright—not Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, or David Mamet—has negotiated the latitude to work so freely. Before a play arrives on Broadway, Wilson refines his story through a series of separate productions. In his rehearsal mufti—black turtleneck and cloth cap—he sits beside the director for almost every hour of every production, and, since "Seven Guitars," he's taken to "writing in the heat of the moment." By the time "King Hed-



"Stanley, we need to talk, so please don't interrupt."

ley II" reaches New York, the play, which shows the fragmented life of a Pittsburgh ghetto during the Reagan years, will have been seen, digested, reconceived, and rewritten after productions in Seattle, Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington. This long reworking, like a brass rubbing, brings the play's parameters and its filigree of detail into bold relief until the drama emerges, as Wilson puts it, "fat with substance."

"When I was writing 'Joe Turner,'" Wilson says, "I realized that someone was gonna stand up onstage and say the words, whatever the hell they were. That's when I realized I had a responsibility to the words. I couldn't have the character say any old thing. There couldn't be any mistakes." To achieve this sort of focus requires the kind of appetite for victory that is epitomized, for Wilson, by a breed of championship racehorses, which in order to win "bite their own necks to get more oxygen." He began his own extraordinary endeavor late, at about forty, and his time is valuable. He does not spend it on the telephone, or watching television, or going to movies (between 1980 and 1991, he saw only two, both directed by Martin Scorsese—"Raging Bull" and "Cape Fear"). His work requires a lot of "doing nothing" to generate "brain space." So Wilson, whom Azula calls "the slippery guy," is usually to be found puttering in the crepuscular gloom of his basement, where he communes with himself and, if he's lucky, taps into what he calls "the blood's memory," that "deepest part of yourself where the ancestors are talking." To do so requires a kind of ritual preparation. "Before I write something, I wash my hands," he says. "I always want to say I approached it with clean hands—you know, a symbolic cleansing."

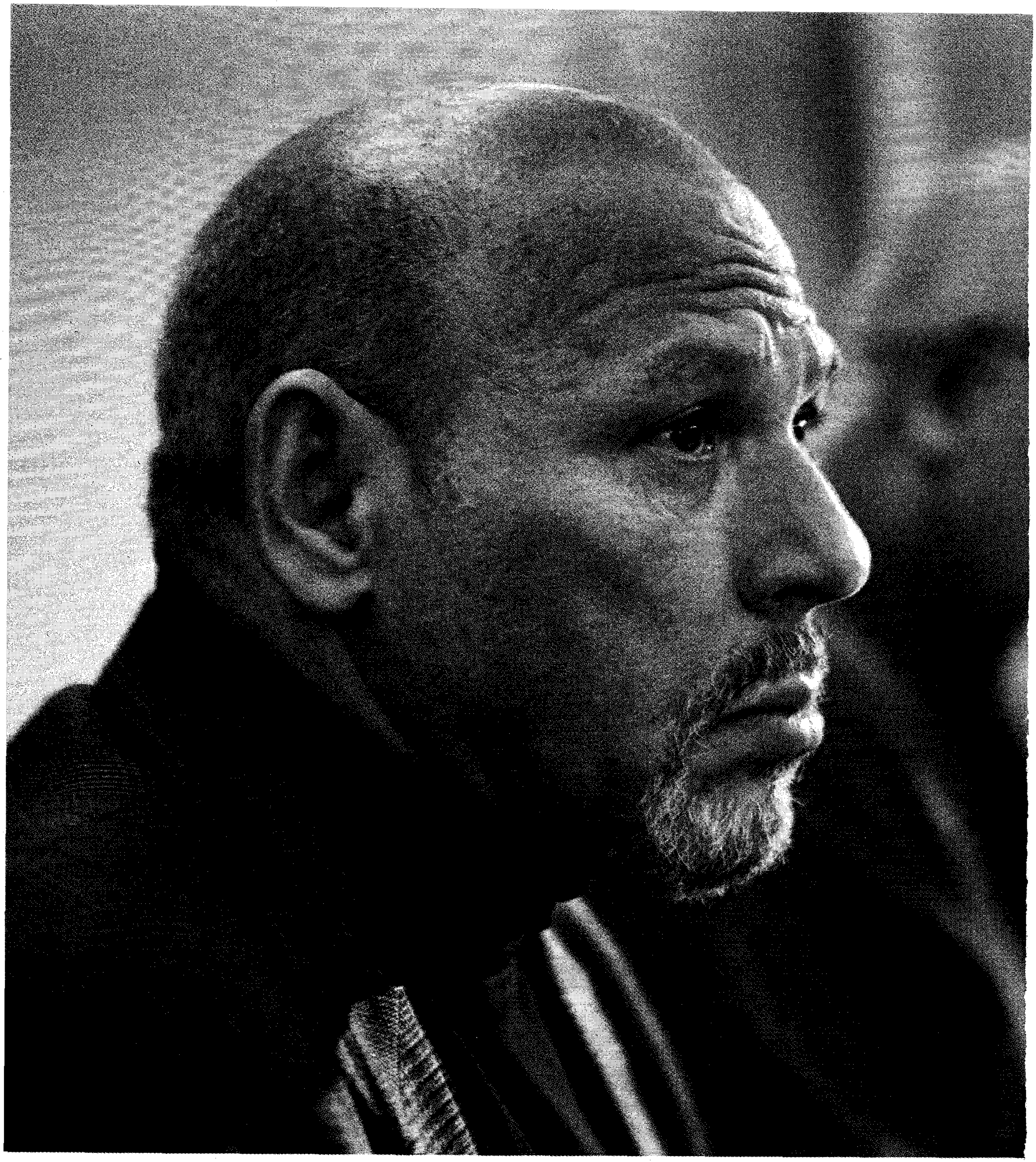
Wilson's plays, filled as they often are with visions and visionaries, have a kind of hoodoo of their own, which can seem strange to white viewers, who are often critical of his use of the supernatural. He is a collagist, making Afro-Christian parables, and his plays are best when the real and the spiritual are wedded ("Joe Turner," "Seven Guitars," "The Piano Lesson"), in order, as he says, "to come up with a third thing, which is neither realism nor allegory." Then, his intensity and his natural eloquence—what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls "an unruly luxuriance of language, an ability to ease between trash talk and near-choral transport"—most effectively highlight another comparatively unsung quality of his writing: the ability to unfetter the heart. Under his focussed gaze, characters take on uncanny, sometimes awesome, life, and, unlike most contemporary male playwrights, he can write memorable roles for women as well as men. Wilson's work is not much influenced by the canon of modern Western plays, almost none of which he has read or seen. "I consider it a blessing that when I started writing plays in earnest, in 1979, I had not read Chekhov. I hadn't read Ibsen. I hadn't read Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, or O'Neill," he says. By then, he had been writing poetry for fifteen years and had read all the major American poets. "It took me eight years to find my own voice as a poet. I didn't want to take eight years to find my voice as a playwright." To this day, as incredible as it seems, with the exception of his own productions and a few of his friends', Wilson has seen only about a dozen plays.

In the age of the sound bite, Wilson is that most endangered of rare birds—a storyteller. A Wilson tale takes about as long as a baseball game, which is to say a good deal longer than the average commercial play. Although audiences will happily watch sports contests into double overtime, the play of ideas and characters is another matter. In this arena, they are accustomed to what Shakespeare called the "two hours' traffic," and Wilson has taken a lot of flak for his capaciousness. According to "The Oxford Companion to American Theatre," his plays "lack a sense of tone and a legitimate, sustained dramatic thrust." This criticism is, to my mind, unjust, but it reflects a distinctive cultural and artistic difference. Virtually all the seminal white postwar plays—"The Glass Menagerie," "Long Day's Journey Into Night," "Death of a Salesman"—revolve around the drama of American individualism; they mark a retreat from exterior into interior life. Wilson, however, dramatizes community. "Community is the most valuable thing that you have in African-American culture," he explains. "The individual good is always subverted to the good of the community." Wilson's plays are distinctive—and longer—because society, not just a psyche, is being mediated. They demonstrate the individual's interaction with the community, not his separation from it.

In Wilson's plays, the white world is a major character that remains almost entirely offstage; nonetheless, its presence is palpable—its rules, its standards, its ownership are always pressing in on the black world and changing the flow of things. "I look around and say, 'Where the barbed wire?'" Hedley says, observing that as a slave he would have been worth twelve hundred dollars, and now he's worth three-fifty an hour. "They got everything else. They got me blocked in every other way. 'Where the barbed wire?'" To which his sidekick replies, "If you had barbed wire you could cut through. You can't cut through having no job." "Blacks know the spiritual truth of white America," Wilson says. "We are living examples of America's hypocrisy. We know white America better than white America knows us." Wilson's plays go some distance toward making up this deficiency. For white members of the audience, the experience of watching a Wilson work is often educational and humanizing. It's the eternal things in Wilson's dramas—the arguments between fathers and sons, the longing for redemption, the dreams of winning, and the fear of losing—that reach across the footlights and link the black world to the white one, from which it is so profoundly separated and by which it is so profoundly defined. To the black world, Wilson's plays are witness; to the white world, they are news. This creates a fascinating racial conundrum, one first raised by Baldwin: "If I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that *you're* not what you thought *you* were *either!*"

II

August Wilson was born in 1945 in Pittsburgh's Hill District. Although it was just four minutes by car from downtown, the Hill—known then as Little Harlem—was a lively, flourishing, self-contained universe, with its own baseball teams, night clubs, businesses, and newspaper, and its own people, some of them legends who had left its one square mile to sing their distinctive songs to the world: Lena Horne, Erroll Garner, Ahmad Jamal, Earl (Fatha) Hines, Billy Eckstine, George Benson. When Wilson was a child, the Hill had a population of fifty-five thousand; since then, as a consequence of the 1968 riots, urban renewal, and competition from



August Wilson may have lost a father in the split with Lloyd Richards, but in Marion McClinton (right) he gained a brother.

white neighborhoods, to which African-Americans now have putative access, the Hill's boundaries and its buoyancy have shrunk. Today, its rows of small, decrepit houses sit on the sloping land like a set of bad teeth—irregular, decaying, with large gaps between them. Beside one such desolate, littered vacant lot, at the rear of 1727 Bedford Avenue, Wilson grew up. You have to bushwhack your way through a tangle of branches that covers the ten steep steps to the boarded front door of the forty-dollar-a-month apartment where Wilson, the fourth of six children, lived with his mother, Daisy Wilson, and his siblings, Freda, Linda Jean, Donna, Richard, and Edwin.

Daisy ran a structured household that was centered on family activities. "Monday at seven, the Rosary came on the radio, so we said the Rosary," Wilson recalls. "Art Linkletter's 'People Are Funny' was Tuesday. We played board games. Then there was the Top Forty.

Photograph by Alen MacWeeney.

Everyone got to pick a song. If your song got to No. 1, you got a nickel." The back yard, where Daisy planted flowers and played dodgeball and baseball with her children and, on summer evenings, sat around a card table for games of Tonk, is blocked off now and difficult to see, but in the set for "Seven Guitars" Wilson preserved the ramshackle solace of the place so exactly that when his sister Linda Jean first saw the show she burst into tears. At the core of Wilson's personality is a kind of truculent resolve, which comes, he says, from his mother's example. (Daisy, who planned her own funeral, down to the gown she'd wear, died of lung cancer in 1983; for the past eighteen years, Wilson has returned to Pittsburgh on her birthday to gather with his family and visit her grave.) She was a tall, strong, handsome homebody, who had left school after the seventh grade and lived by the gospel of clear-eyed common sense and competitiveness. For Wilson, the best example of Daisy's brand of bumptious integrity is an incident that took place around 1955. She was listening to a quiz program that was offering a new washing machine to anyone who could answer a question correctly. Daisy knew the answer, and knew that, with six children, a washing machine would be a blessing. But when she won the contest and the promoters found out that she was black, they offered her instead a certificate to the Salvation Army to get a used washing machine. "Mother said she wanted the new machine or she didn't want any," Wilson says. "I remember Julie Burley"—Charley Burley's wife—"saying to her, 'Oh, Daisy, you got all them kids, what difference does it make? Take the washing machine.' And my mother said, 'Something is not always better than nothing.'"

Wilson's sense of his own uniqueness came, at least in part, from his mother's adoring gaze, what Baldwin called "the crucial, the definitive, the all-but-everlasting judgment." Wilson was Daisy's much longed-for first son. "My mother said she would have had eleven girls—she didn't care—she would have kept trying till she had a son," says Wilson's sister Donna, who remembers being told of her father's disappointment at her own birth. "'Another split-ass,' he said." Freda says, "Mother seemed to have a need for a male in the house to show leadership. She clearly felt that August was the best and smartest of us, so he should be given the duty of going downtown at the age of ten or eleven to pay the bills. It wasn't just about paying the bills. Her underlying reason was to prepare him for the world." "She made me believe that I could do anything," Wilson says. He adds, "I wanted to be the best at whatever I did. I was the best dishwasher in Pittsburgh. I really was. I got a raise the first day I was there. When I sit down and write, I want to write the best play that's ever been written. Sometimes that's a fearsome place to stand, but that's when you call on your courage."

Wilson had a high I.Q.; he also had a gift for language. In kindergarten, he was already entertaining the class with his stories. By the sixth grade, he was turning out love poems for the girls he fancied: "I would I could mend my festering heart / Harpooned by Cupid's flaming dart / But too far the shaft did penetrate / Alas, it is too late." At his Catholic grade school, Wilson's intellectual overreaching drove the nuns crazy. "When they said no one could figure out the Holy Trinity, I was like, 'Why not?' I instantly wanted to prove it could be done," he says. As Wilson grew into adolescence, even his friends acknowledged a certain grandiosity in him; his nickname was Napoleon.

Wilson's hankering to be spectacular was fed not only by his mother's expectations but by his father's abdications. Fritz Kittel considered himself German, although when he had immigrated to America, with his three brothers, in 1915, he was an Austro-Hungarian citizen. The first time he met Daisy, at a neighborhood grocery store, she was shy. At the urging of her grandmother, the next time she saw him she was more flirtatious. They married, but by the time Wilson was born, Linda Jean says, Fritz was staying at the house only on weekends and living in a hotel during the week. Wilson remembers him as "mostly not there," adding, "You stayed out of his way if he was there." Fritz was, Wilson says, "an extremely talented baker," who worked for a while at New York's Waldorf-Astoria. He was also a wine drinker—"Muscatel by the gallon"—and couldn't keep a job.

The only father-son experience Wilson remembers was being taken downtown by Fritz in a blizzard to get a pair of Gene Autry cowboy boots. "He gave me a bunch of change, about seventy-five cents, and told me, 'Jingle it.' To let them know I had money." Otherwise, his memories focus on his father's hectoring abuse. Wilson refers to ferocious arguments, which sometimes ended with Fritz outside heaving bricks at their windows. "We knew to hide," Freda says. "We ran together, we'd fall behind the bed together, then, obviously, someone would sneak up to the

"What's this they say, Billy, about a new, more virulent strain of teen-ager?"

window and look down." If Wilson closes his eyes to conjure up his father, he sees a tall man singing a German song to himself as he comes home from work with three-foot-high brown bags full of baked goods. "When he got angry, the next thing you know, Dad was just throwing the bags on the floor and stomping and crushing all the doughnuts and things in the bag," Linda Jean recalls. "And we needed those morsels." One Thanksgiving, in a tantrum, Fritz pulled the door off the oven and Daisy had to prop it back up with a stick so the turkey could finish roasting. Fritz's tranquil moments could be as tyrannical as his outbursts. "He believed in reading the papers," Freda says. "We had to sit down. We were not allowed to talk. We were not allowed to play. It was complete silence." Freda saw him as a displaced person, "an off-the-boat-type person." She says, "I don't think he ever fit here in America. I don't think he ever accepted black people. Or the culture. I think for my whole family there's a deep sense of abandonment." By 1957, when Wilson was twelve, Daisy had divorced Kittel and taken up with David Bedford, a black man whom she later married. "I loved the man," Wilson says of Bedford, an avid reader who was a community leader, and who, Wilson learned, after his death in 1969, had spent twenty-three years in prison.

Wilson inherited his father's volatile temperament. "He was a kid with a temper," Freda says. "And a sorry loser, because, in his mind, if he played to win he should win because he should have figured out whatever strategy was needed to win. And not figuring out that strategy was just highly unacceptable to him." In this regard, Wilson hasn't changed much over the years. "My goodness, when he got emotional he was mad scary," says the professor and playwright Rob Penny, who was one of Wilson's closest friends on the Hill. "You'd think he was gonna snap out, attack you, or beat you up or something. He was very intense." When he was about twenty, Wilson cuffed his sister Donna and broke her jaw. I asked Constanza Romero what she had found most surprising about Wilson after she married him, and she said, "His temper—his temper scared me." She referred to an explosion over a misplaced telephone number. "He went crazy, absolutely bonkers," she said. "He starts speaking very strongly, cussing himself out. He really doesn't allow himself any mistakes, any leeway."

"I just always felt that the society was lined up against you," Wilson says. "That in order to do anything in the world you were going to have to battle this thing that was out there. It wasn't gonna give you any quarter." For Wilson, the battle began in earnest when he was a freshman at Central Catholic High School, where he was the only black student in his grade and was placed in the advanced class. "There was a note on my desk every single day. It said, 'Go home nigger,' " Wilson says. The indignities—the shoving, the name-calling, the tripping—were constant; so was Wilson's brawling. The Christian Brothers frequently sent him home by taxi. "They would have to walk me through a gantlet of, like, forty kids. I would always want to say to them, 'But you're not saying anything to these forty guys. You're just escorting me through them as though they have a right to stand here.' " Then, one day when Wilson was in his early teens, a student standing in front of him during the Pledge of Allegiance made mention of the "nigger" behind him. "I said, 'O.K., buddy,' " and, at "liberty and justice for all," Wilson punched him. "We go down to Brother Martin's, and he's ready to send me home. I said, 'Hey, why don't we just do this permanently? I do not want to go to school here anymore.' " Wilson went next to a vocational school, where the academic content was "I swear, like fifth-grade work." When his shop teacher, angry that Wilson had knocked in a thumbtack with a T-square, punched Wilson so hard that he knocked him off his chair, Wilson lunged at the teacher and "bounced him off the blackboard." "Give me a pink slip," he said. "I'm leaving this school."

At fifteen, Wilson ended up at Gladstone High School, taking tenth-grade classes but still officially in the ninth grade. He sulked in class, sat in the back, and refused to participate. Then, in an effort to redeem himself in the eyes of a black teacher, who ran an after-school college club Wilson wanted to join, he decided to take one assignment seriously. It was an essay on a historical figure, and Wilson chose Napoleon. "The fact that he was a self-made man, that he was a lieutenant in the army and became the emperor, I liked that," Wilson says. He researched it; he wrote it; he rented a typewriter with money he'd earned mowing lawns and washing cars; he paid his sister Linda Jean twenty-five cents a page to type it; and then he handed it in.

"The next day, the teacher asked me to stay after class," Wilson says. On the paper the teacher had written two marks—A-plus and E, a failing grade. "I'm gonna give you one of these two grades," he told Wilson. Suspecting that one of Wilson's older sisters had written the paper, he asked, "Can you prove to me that you wrote this?" Wilson remembers saying, "Hey, unless you call everybody in here and have all the people prove they wrote them, even the ones that went and copied out of the encyclopedia word for word, I don't feel I should have to prove anything." The teacher circled the E and handed the paper back. "I tore it up, threw it in the wastebasket, and walked out of school," Wilson says.

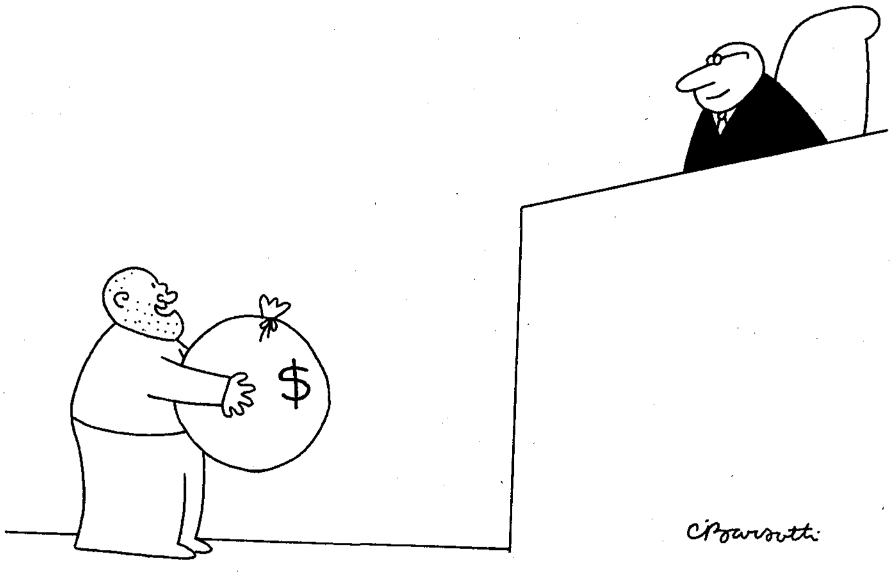
Every morning for the rest of the school year, rather than tell his mother he'd dropped out, Wilson walked three blocks to the local library. Over the next four years, by his own estimation, he read three hundred books, spending as many as five hours a day in the library. He read everything—sociology, anthropology, theology, fiction. "The world opened up," he says. "I could wander through the stacks. I didn't need anyone to teach me. All you had to do was have an interest and a willingness to extract the information from the book." It was about this time that Wilson began to see himself as a kind of warrior, surviving unapologetically on his own terms. The first person with whom he had to do battle was Daisy, whose dashed dreams for her son made her a furious opponent. "She told him he was no good, that he would amount to nothing," Linda Jean says. "It was relentless. It was an agony for him. He suffered many indignities. He was often denied food. She would take the food out of the refrigerator, put it in her bedroom, lock the door, and then go out. He was made to live in the basement for a while. She said he was dirty. She didn't want him in the house upstairs."

By the time Wilson was banished to the basement, he had decided to become a writer. "I was like, 'O.K., I'm gonna sit here, I'm gonna write some stories. I'll show you,' " Wilson says. "I was gonna demonstrate my worth to her. I negotiated cooking privileges. I'd get fifteen cents and go buy me three pounds of potatoes. I was gonna demonstrate that I could feed and take care of myself." He lasted a week. "My mother was very disappointed," Wilson says. "She saw a lot of potential that I'd squandered, as far as she was concerned." To get out of the house, Wilson joined the Army. He took the Officer Candidate School test and came in second in his battalion, just two points behind the leader. Then, as often happens in Wilson's plays and in his life, he came up against the rules: to be an officer, you had to be nineteen; he was seventeen. And, if he couldn't be an officer, he wasn't interested.

Wilson headed across the country to California, where he worked in a pharmacy, until his father's terminal illness brought him back to Pittsburgh. Wilson and Linda Jean visited their father, who told them stories about being in the Army and the battle of the Argonne Forest. "Then he suddenly looked up and said, 'Who are you?' " Wilson says. "He basically chased us out of there, but for a couple of hours we had a great time." On his deathbed, Wilson's father called for his son "Fritz." Afterward, Wilson wrote a muted memorial, "Poem for the Old Man," which begins by evoking his father in his prime ("Old Fritz, when young / could lay a harem") and ends with Wilson himself ("his boxing boy / Is hitting all the new places / Too soon to make a mark").

Wilson took refuge in the African-American community, and it, in turn, nurtured him and contained him and his rage at his father's abandonment. "He's so faithful to the blackness. He's faithful like a father—that represents fidelity to him," says James Earl Jones, who starred in "Fences." Wilson found another father figure in Chawley Williams, a black drug dealer turned poet, who became his protector on the street. "August wasn't really black. He was half-and-half," Williams says. "He was too dark to be white, and he was too white to be dark. He was in no man's land. I knew he was lost. I was lost. Kindred brothers know one another. We were trying to become men. We didn't even know what it meant." In time, Wilson would write himself into the center of modern black American history. But when he hit the streets he had no money, no marketable skills, no proven talent. He was, he says, "searching for something you can claim as yours."

On April 1, 1964, Wilson walked into downtown Pittsburgh to McFerron's typewriter store and put twenty dollars on the counter for a heavy black Royal Standard in the window. He'd earned the money by writing a term paper—"Two Violent Poets: Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg"—for Freda, who was then at Fordham University. He lugged the typewriter up the Hill to the basement apartment he'd rented in a boarding house, placed the machine on the kitchen table, put a piece of loose-leaf paper in it, and typed his name. Actually, he typed every possible combination of his name—Fred A. Kittel, Frederick A. Kittel, Frederick A. Wilson, A. Wilson, August Wilson—and settled finally on the last because it looked best on paper. He then laboriously typed a batch of poems. He'd heard that *Harper's* paid a dollar a line, so he sent the poems there. "They came back three days later," Wilson says. "I said, 'Oh, I see. This is serious. I'm gonna have to learn how to write a poem.' I wasn't deterred by that. I was emboldened." But because he "didn't like the feeling of rejection," Wilson didn't send out another poem for five years. (His first published



"Then I thought, Why should I spend it all on fancy lawyers?"

work was “Muhammad Ali,” which appeared in *Black World* in 1969.) “It was sufficient for me to know that I wrote poetry and I was growing as an artist,” he says.

Most sightings of Wilson on the Hill were in restaurants—the White Tower, Eddie’s Restaurant, the B & W, Moose’s—bent over, scribbling on his tablet or on napkins. Decades later, Wilson would walk through the neighborhood and people would stop him and ask, “You still drawin’?” “I found out later people thought I was a bum,” Wilson says. “The thing that sustained me was that my idea of myself was different from the idea that society, my mother, and even some of my friends had of me. I saw myself as a grand person.” He adds, “I saw the pictures of Richard Wright, Langston Hughes—all of them always had a suit on. I thought, Yeah, that’s me. I want to be like that.” At a local thrift shop, he bought white shirts for a dime, the broad ties he favored for a nickel, and sports coats for thirty-five cents. In the poetic sphere, he’d come under the influence of Dylan Thomas, and he went through the Black Power movement with a coat and tie and a pipe, intoning poetry in an English accent. “People thought he was crazy in the neighborhood,” Chawley Williams says. He adds, “When I met August, I was in the drug world. Here come August. He’s sensitive, he’s articulate, he has talent, he’s trying to write. And the hustlers of the streets is at him. They could get him to do things, ’cause he wanted to belong. He would allow them to come to wherever he stayed at to eat, to get high and shoot their dope, to lie up with different women. They were trying to get him to get high. I put a halt to that.”

Fish love water, it is said, and are cooked in it. But although Wilson swam in this predatory world he never felt threatened. If you ask him now to imagine the street back then, a smile crosses his face; he holds out his big right hand and trembles it. “A shimmy,” he says. “The avenue shimmered. Hundreds of people on the sidewalks. Life going on.” The vibrancy ravished him. Once, riding up Centre Avenue in a friend’s convertible, Wilson heard gunshots. “I hopped out of the car and ran down to where the gunshots were,” he says. “There’s this woman chasing the man around the car, and—*boom!*—she shot him. He was bleeding, and he asked this guy, ‘Man, drive me to the hospital.’ The guy said, ‘You ain’t gon’ get all that blood in my car!’ ” Wilson adds, “I remember one time I didn’t go to bed for damn near three days because every time I’d go to bed I felt like I was missing something.”

CHIQUITA GREGORY

Sagaponack swings the Atlantic around its head
Like an athlete in the windup for the hammer throw.
It is a hurricane and the radio
Predicts a tornado will follow.

The air violently
Smells fresh like nowhere else,
And I am just assuming it is
You calling to everyone lunch is ready.

We are heads bowed
At our place cards. Zeus is saying grace
When the chairs begin to shake and lightning outside
Shazams you back to life, tsunami

Light as a feather, the feather of life,
Very long legs,
Very short shorts, a chef’s apron in front, so that from
Behind . . . Goddess,

Although Little Richard, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, Chuck Berry, and other rock and rollers had spilled over the back-yard fences of Wilson’s childhood, it wasn’t until this time that he first heard the blues. For a nickel at a St. Vincent de Paul charity shop, he bought a bootleg 78-r.p.m. record on whose tattered yellow label he could make out the words “Bessie Smith: ‘Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine.’ ” Smith’s impudent, unabashed sound stunned him. “The universe stuttered and everything fell to a new place,” he wrote later. Like James Baldwin, who wrote that hearing Bessie Smith for the first time “helped to reconcile me to being a ‘nigger,’ ” Wilson saw the moment as an epiphany: “a birth, a baptism, and a redemption all rolled up into one.” Wilson played the new record twenty-two times straight. “Then I started laughing, you know, ’cause it suddenly dawned on me that there was another record on the other side.” He adds, “It made me look at the world differently. It gave the people in the rooming house where I lived, and also my mother, a history I didn’t know they had. It was the beginning of my consciousness that I was the carrier of some very valuable antecedents.”

Wilson considers the blues “the best literature we have.” As a way of preparing the emotional landscape for each play of his cycle, he submerges himself in the blues of the period. For “Hedley,” for instance, he’s asking himself, “How’d we get from Percy Sledge’s ‘Warm and Tender Love’ to ‘You My Bitch’?” Even the structure of his sentences—the frequent reiteration of themes and words—owes much to the music’s repetitions, its raucous pitch and improvised irony. From “Two Trains Running”:

> A nigger with a gun is bad news. You can’t even use the word “nigger” and “gun” in the same sentence. You say the word “gun” in the same sentence with the word “nigger” and you in trouble. The white man panic. Unless you say, “The policeman shot the nigger with his gun.”

He particularly likes it when singers speak their names in song. “There’s

You have returned to earth in a mood and
In a storm, and I have no doubt that
Irreplaceable trees on Sagg Main are davening
Themselves to the ground. They

Rend their clothes and tear their hair out out
Of joy. Chiquita, how can anyone be so
Angry who has died? The whirling light in
The drive is the police, here

To urge the last holdouts in houses near the
Ocean to leave. To help us
Decide, they suavely ask for the name of next of kin.
The ocean bursts into towering flames of foam.

The lobsters in the pot are screaming
Inside the reddening roar.
Your aproned ghost keeps boiling more, keeps boiling more,
And turns to serve the gore.

—*Frederick Seidel*

something wonderful about that," he says. "They're making a stand. They're saying, 'This is me. This is what I have to say.' " In the context of what Zora Neale Hurston called "the muteness of slavery," the notion of singing solo and making a personal statement is, for African-Americans, a comparatively new and extraordinarily potent thing, which Wilson dramatizes in his plays. In his theatrical vocabulary, "finding a song" is both the expression of spirit and the accomplishment of identity. Some of his characters have a song that they can't broadcast; others have given up singing; some have been brutalized into near-muteness; and others have turned the absence of a destiny into tall talk—the rhetoric of deferred dreams. But Wilson's most brilliant demonstration of "carrying other people's songs and not having one of my own"—as one character puts it—is in "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," where a conjure man called Bynum, who has a song, discourses with Loomis, who has been separated from his. Bynum says:

> Now, I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forgot his song. Forgot how to sing it. A fellow forget that and he forget who he is. Forget how he's supposed to mark down life. . . . See, Mr. Loomis, when a man forgets his song he goes off in search of it . . . till he find out he's got it with him all the time.

Music, in Wilson's plays, is more than slick Broadway entertainment. A juba dance banged out on a table, a work song beaten out with chairs and glasses, a gut-bucket blues demonstrate the African-American genius for making something out of nothing. They take an empty world, as Ma Rainey says, and "fill it up with something."

Blues people, Ralph Ellison once wrote, are "those who accepted and lived close to their folk experience." On the Hill, the blues cemented in Wilson's mind the notion that he was somehow "the conduit of ancestors." West's Funeral Home—which figures in "Two Trains Running"—was just around the corner from Eddie's Restaurant, and Wilson, for some deep personal reason and not for art's sake, felt compelled routinely to pay his respects to whomever had died. "I didn't have to know them. I felt that this is a life that has gone before me," he explains. From Claude McKay's "Home to Harlem," he learned of a hangout in his own neighborhood called Pat's Place—a cigar store with a pool hall in the back—where a lot of the community elders congregated. Pat's Place became Wilson's Oxford, and its garrulous denizens—"walking history books," Wilson calls them—his tutors. They called him Youngblood. "I was just like, 'Hey, man, how did you get to be so old, 'cause it's hard out here.' I really wanted to know how they survived. How do you get to be seventy years old in America?" Wilson recalls meeting one old man at Pat's Place who said to him, "I been watchin' you. You carryin' around a ten-gallon bucket. You carry that ten-gallon bucket through life, and you gon' always be disappointed. Get you a little cup. And, that way, if somebody put a little bit in it, why, you got sumpin'." Wilson adds, "I managed to cut it down to a gallon bucket, but I never did get that little cup."

"What I discovered is that writing was the only thing society would allow me to do," he said in 1991. "I couldn't have a job or be a lawyer because I didn't do all the things necessary. What I was allowed to do was write. If they saw me over in the corner scribbling on a piece of paper they would say, 'That is just a nigger over in the corner scribbling on a piece of paper.' Nobody said, 'Hey, you can't do that.' So I felt free." On the street, as a defensive maneuver, Wilson says he "learned to keep my mouth shut," but, according to Chawley Williams, "when August stood onstage and read his poetry, there was a difference in him that didn't exist at no other time. He stood tall and proud. He stood with that definiteness." He was supported in this pursuit by his friends in the neighborhood—Williams, Rob Penny, and Nicholas Flournoy, who were all aspiring poets. The group founded the Centre Avenue Poets Theatre Workshop, out of which came the journal *Connection* (Wilson was its poetry editor), then the Halfway Art Gallery, and, from 1968 to 1972, the Black Horizons Theatre, which Wilson co-founded with Penny, who served as house playwright.

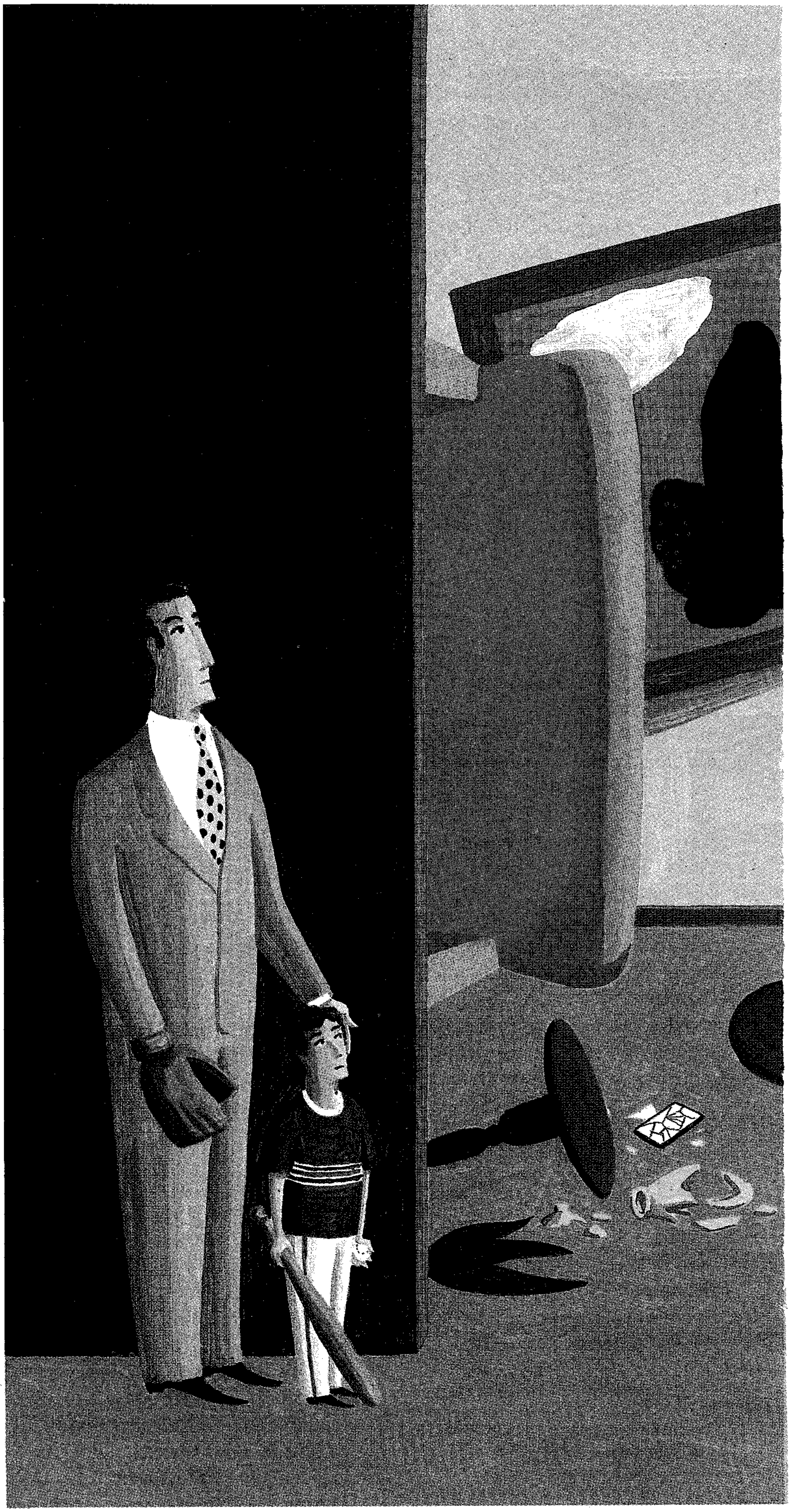
During this time, Wilson had a daughter, Sakina Ansari (to whom "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" is dedicated), in a marriage to Brenda Burton, which ended in 1973. "She moved out with the baby," Linda Jean says. "August came home to an empty house. The shock and pain were unbearable to him. In a nutshell, she thought his writing was a waste of time, he wouldn't amount to anything." Although Wilson himself always felt successful, he says, he still hadn't achieved what he calls, quoting the poet Robert Duncan, "surety—the line burned in the hand." He says, "I had been trying to get to that point. I didn't approach it lightly. I worked concertedly toward growth." Finally, in 1973, in a poem called "Morning Statement," Wilson found his poetic voice:

> It is the middle of winter
> November 21 to be exact
> I got up, buckled my shoes,
> I caught a bus and went riding into town.
> I just thought I'd tell you.

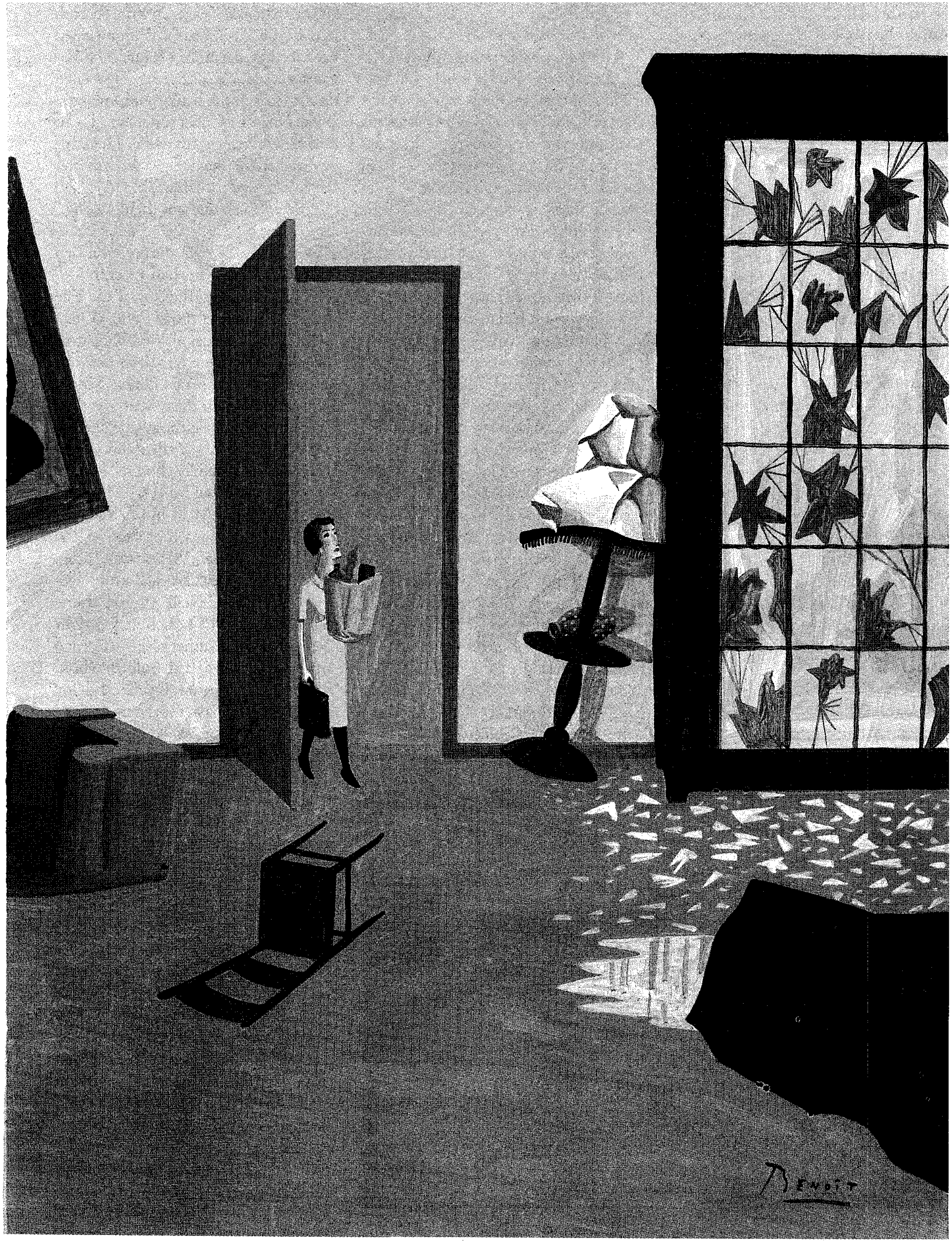
"The poem didn't pretend to be anything else," Wilson says. "It wasn't struggling to say eternal things. It was just claiming the ground as its own thing. For me, it was so liberating." But his liberation as a playwright didn't begin until March 5, 1978, when he moved away from the Hill, to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he married Judy Oliver, a white social worker. In doing so, he went from a neighborhood that had fifty-five thousand blacks to a state that had the same number. "There weren't many black folks around," he says. "In that silence, I could hear the language for the first time." Until then, Wilson says, he hadn't "valued or respected the way that black folks talked. I'd always thought that in order to create art out of it you had to change that." Now he missed the street talk and wanted to preserve it. "I got lonely and missed those guys and sort of created them," he says. "I could hear the music."

III

By the time Wilson reached St. Paul, he'd directed a handful of amateur productions, and his friend the director Claude Purdy had staged a musical satire based on a series of Wilson's poems. But despite a paying gig at the Science Museum of Minnesota, where Wilson wrote children's plays on science-related subjects, he was, by anyone's standard, a theatrical tyro. As early as 1976, he'd begun work on a piece about Ma Rainey, but then, he says, "it never occurred to me to make the musicians characters in the play. I couldn't have written the characters." His dialogue had a kind of florid artiness. In one of his early dramatic experiments, which involved a conversation between an old man and a woman on a park bench, the woman said, "Terror hangs over the night like a hawk." Wilson had at least one play, "The Coldest Day of the Year," produced in this stilted style. "It wasn't black American lan-



SKETCHBOOK BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS *The beginning of the professional baseball season*



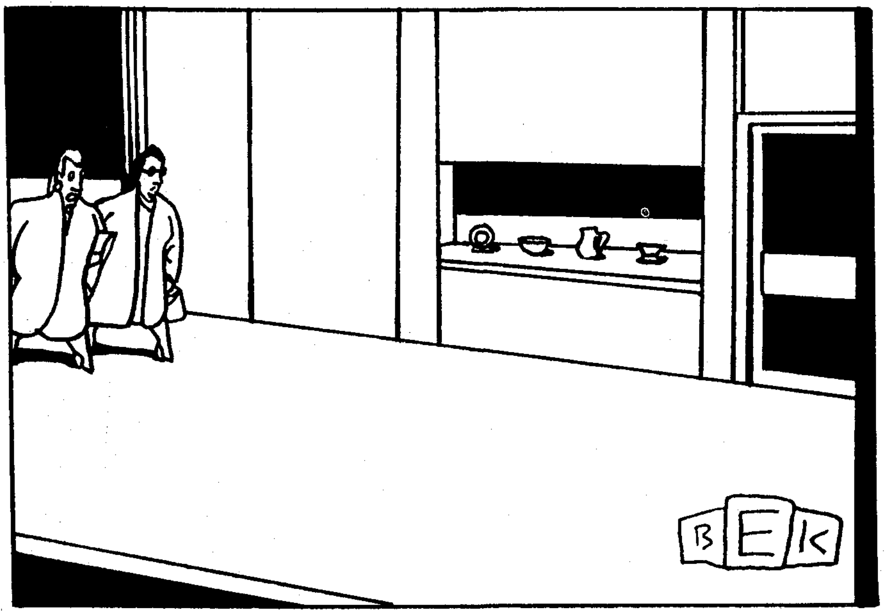
also inaugurates the annual father–son ritual of playing catch in the back yard, the park, or any other available space.

guage," he says. It wasn't theatre, either.

In the fall of 1977, Wilson came across the work of the painter Romare Bearden. As he thumbed through Bearden's series of collages "The Prevalence of Ritual," he discovered his "artistic mentor." Bearden's paintings made simple what Wilson's writing had so far only groped to formulate: "Black life presented on its own terms, on a grand and epic scale, with all its richness and fullness, in a language that was vibrant and which, made attendant to everyday life, ennobled it, affirmed its value, and exalted its presence." He adds, "My response was visceral. I was looking at myself in ways I hadn't thought of before and have never ceased to think of since." In later years, Wilson would stand outside Bearden's house on Canal Street, in New York, "in silent homage, daring myself to knock." He didn't knock, but, he has written, if Bearden "had answered . . . and if I were wearing a hat, I would have taken it off in tribute." (In the end, Wilson's true homage was his plays, two of which—"Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket," which became "Joe Turner," and "The Piano Lesson"—took their titles from Bearden paintings.)

Years before, Wilson, who then "couldn't write dialogue," had asked Rob Penny, "How do you make characters talk?" Penny answered, "You don't. You listen to them." Now, in 1979, when Wilson sat down to write "Jitney," a play set at the taxi stand that had been one of Wilson's hangouts on the Hill, the penny, as it were, dropped. For the first time, he was able to listen to his characters and let them speak. "I found that exhilarating," he says. "It felt like this was what I'd been looking for, something that was mine, that would enable me to say anything." For Wilson, the revelation was that "language describes the idea of the one who speaks; so if I'm speaking the oppressor's language I'm in essence speaking his ideas, too. This is why I think blacks speak their own language, because they have to find another way." While writing "Jitney," he proved to himself that he didn't have to reconstitute black life; he just had to capture it.

Wilson sat at Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips, a restaurant up the street from his apartment in St. Paul, for ten days in a row until the play was finished. At Penny's suggestion, he submitted it to the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, a sprawling estate in Waterford, Connecticut, where each summer about a dozen playwrights are provided with a dramaturge, a director, and a cast to let them explore their flawed but promising plays. The O'Neill rejected "Jitney"; its incredulous author, assuming that no one had read it, submitted the play again. The O'Neill rejected it again. Wilson took serious stock of his newfound calling; his inner dialogue, he says, was " 'Maybe it's not as good as you think. You have to write a better play.' 'I've already written the best play I can write.' 'Why don't you write above your talent?' 'Oh, man, how can you do that?' 'Well, you can write beneath it, can't you?' 'Oh, yeah.' " Wilson turned back to the play on Ma Rainey and began to imagine it differently. "I opened up the door to the band room," he says. "Slow Drag and Cutler was talking about how Slow Drag got his name. Then this guy walked in—he had glasses, carrying the books—he became Toledo. I had discovered them and got them talking."



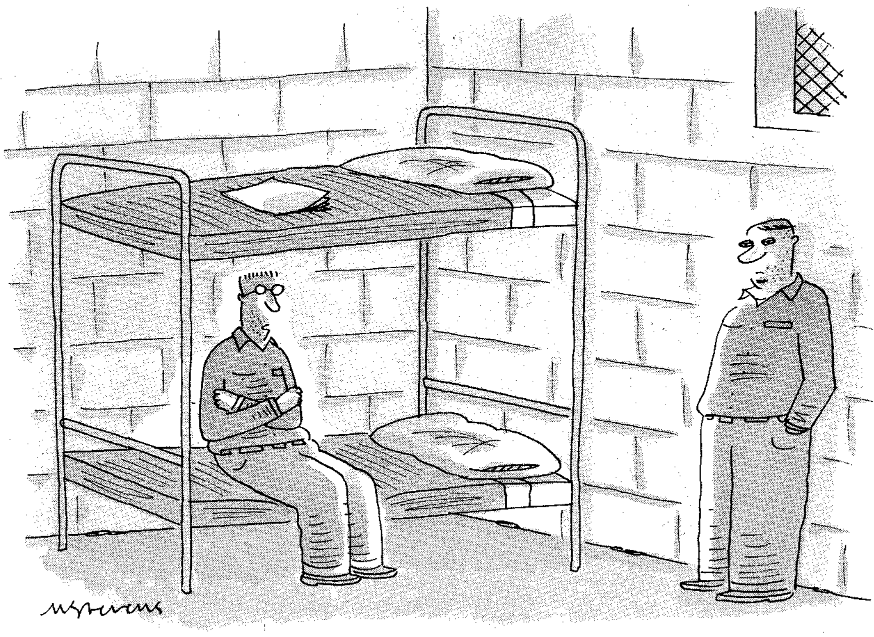
"I just don't want to turn into one of those women who never shut up about the Duchess of Windsor."

On August 1, 1982, the producer Ben Mordecai, who had recently become the managing director of the Yale Repertory Theatre, drove up to Waterford to see his boss, Lloyd Richards. Richards, who is of Jamaican descent, was the head of the Yale Drama School and, for more than thirty years, worked during the summer as the artistic director of the O'Neill. He is a man of few words, most of them carefully chosen. "Is there anyone here I should meet?" Mordecai asked Richards. "Meet him," Richards said, nodding toward the porch of the main building, where Wilson was sitting. When "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" was accepted at the O'Neill, Wilson stumbled onto the right person at the right place at the right time. Other African-Americans, such as Ed Bullins, whose "Twentieth-Century Cycle" did for South Philadelphia in the sixties and seventies what Wilson would do for Pittsburgh, were not as lucky. With access to theatres and to grant-giving agencies, Richards, who had directed "A Raisin in the Sun" on Broadway, was well positioned to usher Wilson's talent directly into the mainstream. Richards became, Wilson wrote, "my guide, my mentor, and my provocateur," and all of Wilson's subsequent plays until "Seven Guitars" would follow the same golden path—from the O'Neill to Yale to Broadway.

When "Ma Rainey" went to Yale, in 1984, Richards took over. "We go into the room with the actors, we read the play," Wilson says, describing the first day of rehearsal. "An actor had a question about a character. I started to speak, and Lloyd answered the question. There was another question, and Lloyd answered it again. I remember there was a moment when I thought, The old fox knows what's going on. This is gonna be O.K."

"We had a pattern of work," Richards says of their partnership, which in time would become as influential as that of Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan. "I would work on it, check it with him, so I included him, but I was the director." He adds, "August was very receptive in the early days. He had a lot to learn and knew it. He was a big sponge, absorbing everything." Richards sent him to the sound booth, to the paint shop, to the lighting designer. "As he learned structure—playwriting, really—he was also learning everything else," Richards says.

Richards is not a gregarious man, and his natural reticence complements his collaborative, indirect way of working: "I try to provoke the artist to find the answer *I* want him to find." When Wilson sent Richards a version of "The Piano Lesson," he says, "Lloyd calls me up and says, 'I think you have one too many scenes there.' 'O.K., Lloyd, I'll look at that.' End of conversation. I go to the play. I see this scene that looks like it's expendable. I pull it out. Talking to Lloyd about something else a couple of days later, I say, 'Oh, Lloyd, by the way, I took the scene out.' Lloyd says, 'Good.' To this day, I don't know if we were talking about the same scene." Richards says, "He cut the scene that needed to be cut." He adds, "August writes wonderful scenes. He must think they're wonderful, 'cause they go on and on and on. To the point where they advance the play much further than it needs to be advanced at that moment." Wilson's "Fences," which was the second-most-produced play on American professional stages in 1989, was transformed by Richards, over several productions, from a four-and-a-half-hour first appearance at the O'Neill to its commercial length of less than three hours not just by cutting but by reorganizing. This began Wilson's practice of refining his plays in the regionals. "The Piano Lesson"—which involves a contest for ownership of a prized family piano between a sister, who wants to keep it as a symbol of her African-American heritage, and her brother, who wants to sell it to buy land on the plantation where their ancestors were slaves—had still not found a satisfactory ending after a year of touring. It finally got one when Richards suggested to Wilson that the battle between the brother and sister was missing a third party: the spirit of the white family who also had claims on the piano. "August wrote a wonderful speech describing how the piano came into the family and how they had stolen it from this white family," Richards says. "That brought the piece together."

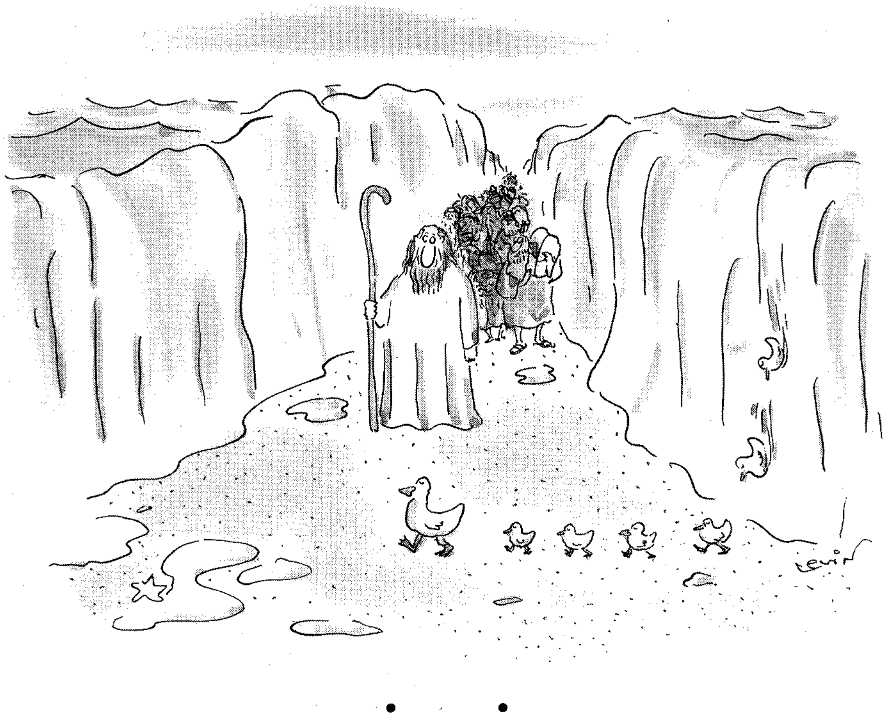


"It started out as a food fight, but then it got totally out of hand."

When "The Piano Lesson" was made into a TV movie, in 1995, Wilson served as a producer, a shift in power that also augured a change in his relationship with Richards. At one meeting, a production designer, Patricia Van Ryker, who hadn't read the original play—which states that the piano's legs are "carved in the manner of African sculpture," to represent the characters' African heritage—laid out her plans to decorate the piano with images of plantation life that fit within the time frame of the play. Wilson exploded. "He was screaming," Van Ryker recalls. " 'How dare you do this! You're insulting my relatives! My race!' It was like I'd thrown kerosene on him." Richards recalls the moment as "terrible," and says, "I don't function dictatorially. I don't give directives. I saw August in a position of power. I knew I couldn't work *for* him."

As Wilson grew in confidence, craft, and stature, it became increasingly difficult for him to play the protégé in the partnership. "The two of them artistically began drifting apart, which was, I think, a natural thing," Mordecai says. "The collaboration wasn't happening at the level it had in earlier years." As Wilson saw it, "Lloyd slowed down," but it's just as true to say that Wilson grew up. When a rewritten version of "Jitney" was up for production at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, in 1996, Wilson chose as his director Marion McClinton, who had done inventive second productions of many of his earlier plays. Wilson may have lost a kind of father in the split with Richards, but in McClinton he gained a brother. Where Richards's productions were stately, McClinton's are fluid; where Richards's process was formal, McClinton's is relaxed. "The first conversation we had, August said to me, 'My style is I don't talk to the actors,' " McClinton recalls. "I said, 'I don't care if you talk to the actors. Whatever gets the information to them the clearest and cleanest, that's what I'm for.' "

"August is a soldier," McClinton says, and he's referring to more than Wilson's theatrical battles. Wilson, who cites the Black Power movement as "the kiln in which I was fired," describes himself as a "race man." And his very specific anthropological understanding of American history has led him to some hard, politically incorrect opinions. For instance, he believes that it was a mistake for African-Americans to leave the South. "The blood and bones of two hundred and fifty years of our ancestors are buried in the South, and we came North," he says. "I think if we'd stayed South and continued to empower our-



selves, in terms of acquiring land—we already had acres of farmland that we owned—we'd have had ten black senators in the United States. We'd be represented. We'd be a more culturally secure and culturally self-sufficient people."

Wilson's insistence on preserving and sustaining an African-American identity led to a well-publicized argument with Robert Brustein, the artistic director of Boston's American Repertory Theatre, that culminated in a formal debate at New York's Town Hall, in 1997. Among many contrarian points, Wilson argued against the current fashion for "color-blind casting"—a bias shared by McClinton, who refers to the practice as "Cyclops casting." "It's color-blind in one eye," he says. "You're quite aware of the fact that we're black—that's why we're not asked to present that in our performance, where the white actors can bring whatever history and interior self-knowledge they have into a rehearsal process and into the making of character." In Wilson's view, to mount an all-black production of, say, "Death of a Salesman" is to deny us "the need to make our own investigations from the cultural ground on which we stand as black Americans." In his exchange with Brustein, Wilson pointed out the transparent inequity of having sixty-six regional theatres and only one that can be considered black. (He subsequently conceived and supported the African Grove Institute for the Arts, an organization that promotes African-American theatre.) In America, "the subscription audience holds the seats of our theatres hostage to the mediocrity of its tastes, and serves to impede the further development of an audience for the work that we do," he said. "Intentional or not, it serves to keep blacks out of the theatre, where they suffer no illusion of welcome anyway." This call for an African-American theatre was immediately seized upon by the press as separatist, despite the fact that Wilson himself disputed the label. "We are not separatists, as Mr. Brustein asserts," he said. "We are Americans trying to fulfill our talents. We are not the servants at the party. We are not apprentices in the kitchens. . . . We are Africans. We are Americans." The aftermath of the debate—something of a tempest in a teapot—still lingers (and is still misconstrued). "He took that hit for a lot of other people," McClinton says. "That's what a champion does—a champion fights." When Wilson gave me a book of his first three plays, he inscribed it, "The struggle continues."

My first sighting of McClinton and Wilson at work was last November, in the rehearsal room of Chicago's new Goodman Theatre, where "King Hedley II" was the inaugural production. They sat shoulder to shoulder at the rehearsal table. McClinton, a heavy man, wore a baggy white T-shirt and a black fedora; he chugged at an economy-sized Dr Pepper. Wilson, in his trademark cap, sat bent slightly forward and absolutely still. His eyes were trained on the figure of Hedley, a former killer trying to make a go of it on the Hill, as he knelt in front of a flower patch demarked in rehearsal by a few stones on the concrete floor. His mother, Ruby, stood nearby, watching him. "You need some good dirt," she told him. "Them seeds ain't gonna grow in that dirt." Hedley responded, "This the only dirt I got. This is me right here." The words—the opening of the play—linked Wilson's newest protagonist to all the other desperate heroes of his cycle, and to himself: men attempting, in one way or another, to claim their inheritance. Wilson leaned across to whisper something to McClinton, who, keeping his eyes on the actors, nodded, took another hit of soda, and stopped the rehearsal to adjust the blocking. "King don't listen well," the actor playing Hedley said. "He's a king," McClinton replied. "Kings don't listen."

At the break, Wilson headed off to the theatre's loading bay for a cigarette. There he brooded about Aunt Esther, the three-hundred-and-sixty-six-year-old character whose death the play announces. "See, Aunt Esther is the tradition," he said. "If you don't value that, then you lose it. So, in 1985, these kids are out there killing one another. Aunt Esther dies of grief. People quit going up to her house. The weeds are all grown over. You can't even find the door no more. So she dies." He added, "If you had a connection to your grandparents and understood their struggle to survive, you wouldn't be out there in the street killing someone over fifteen dollars' worth of narcotics. You have to know your history. Then you'll have a purposeful presence in the world."

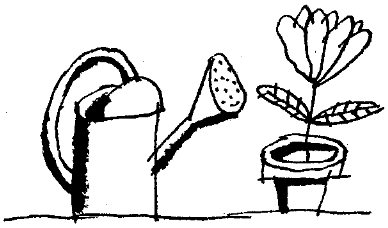
As he readied "Hedley" for New York, Wilson had been trying to make a start on his nineteen-hundreds play, in which Aunt Esther is a central character. Like Romare Bearden, Wilson opens himself up to his subjects and communes with them until he finds a pattern: "I just invite some of the people I know to come into the room and give it an ambience." "Fences" began with the ending; Wilson says that he saw his hero, Troy Maxson, "standing out on this brilliant starry night with this baby in his arms, talking to this woman. I didn't know who the woman was." "Two Trains Running" began in a New Haven restaurant, where Wilson picked up a napkin and wrote, "When I left out of Jackson I said I was gonna buy me a big Ford. Was gonna drive by Mr. Henry Ford's house and honk the horn. If anybody come to the window, I was gonna wave. Then I was going out, and buy me a 30.06, come on back to Jackson and drive up to Mr. Stovall's house. Only this time I wasn't waving."

By contrast, Aunt Esther had been balky about making her presence known. "I said, 'O.K., Aunt Esther, talk to me.' And she says, 'There's a lot of things I don't talk about.' And that threw me, because I didn't have anything to write then," Wilson says. A month later, he tried again. This time, he asked Aunt Esther, "O.K., what *don't* you talk about?" "I don't talk about the trees. The trees didn't have spirits," she told Wilson. "What does that mean? What that means is that none of your world is present here. You're looking at this landscape that's totally foreign to you. So I started writing that," Wilson says. "Then she started talking about the water, and I find she's talking about the Atlantic Ocean. And she starts talking about a city, a half mile by a half mile, down in there. She has a map to the city," he adds. "I think the map is important, so I have to pick the right time to approach that idea about the map. If I do it this afternoon, I get something entirely different than if I do it next week. It's intuition. You have to keep your eyes and ears open for clues. There's no compass."

In "King Hedley II," Hedley's sacrifice keeps a dying black tradition alive; in life, Wilson has also made a sacrifice to renew a connection to the past. He seems to know that the price he's paid for his enormous accomplishment is other people; and he has recently begun to take stock of his life and resolve "to do something different." He is making noises about retiring. Not long ago, when he returned to Seattle, Wilson, who had been away, by his own admission, "for the past two years," was dismayed to discover that Azula didn't know he lived there. "You live in all the places," she told him. "Boston, New York, Pittsburgh." "No, I live here," he said. He took Azula upstairs and showed her his clothes in the closet.

Wilson, who is an insomniac, shares a bed with both Azula and Constanza. At lights-out, Azula will say, "Don't let the bedbugs bite." Wilson will reply, "If they do, take a few," which leaves his daughter the final word: " 'Cause I got them from you." When they wake up, Wilson says, "Good morning, Sunshine." Azula replies, "Good morning, Big Old Dad." But these moments of connection are only one side of the story. Wilson, who has created a universe of fully imagined characters, whose histories he knows in minute detail, is not as curious about the history of those close to him. "I've been married before," Constanza says. "He's never asked me a single question about that. I mean a lot to him, but what is it I mean to him if I'm not a complete person with history, with wants, with needs?" Constanza met Wilson at Yale fourteen years ago, when she designed costumes for "The Piano Lesson," and she has a kind of clear-eyed fatalism about her life with this ambitious storyteller. "It's been hard," she says. "I don't get the love from him that all of me would like. I don't have a partner through the little things in life. He just doesn't reach that intimate part of everyday life." She continues, "In his mind, he's a great father, a great man, a great husband. One time, I was saying to Azula, when she was going to sleep, 'I'm going to teach you how to choose a really good husband for yourself.' And then August said, 'Just like your daddy.' And I was thinking to myself, No!"

"Be where you are"—a maxim Lloyd Richards drilled into Wilson—is a habit that Wilson is "still working at." When he is at home, Wilson is pretty much wrapped in his own solitude, "brewing," as his sister Freda calls it. "I call him the deepest pool I have ever seen in my life," Constanza says. "You can throw a rock inside this man and you'll never see it hit bottom. He's a mystery to me in many ways. He's reachable only in concise sentences." Wilson's plays are brilliantly furnished with characters and incident, but he hasn't yet managed to furnish his own home. "It's gone beyond eccentricity," Constanza says. "It's an outward symbol of our marriage being so out of the ordinary. We can't even furnish our own house. I mean, that's sad." Wilson's critical eye and Constanza's conviction that he would disapprove if she took the decoration into her own hands keeps them at a stalemate. "He's extremely critical," Constanza says. "The closer you are to him, the more critical he is. That's a pattern that his mother passed on to him."



Ordinarily, according to his wife, Wilson "has a hard time laughing at himself." But in the presence of his daughter the sombre, self-absorbed Wilson drops away. "I've seen a different August with Azula," McClinton agrees. "She brings out such a playful side of him. He came to the first day of rehearsal in Seattle for 'King Hedley II' wearing a bunny mask with the ears sticking up." Wilson has taught Azula some of the nonsense songs that he learned at the age of five from an uncle: together, they sing, "Jo and Mo had a candy store / Tellin' fortunes behind the door / The police ran in / Joe ran out / Hollerin' 'Run, Mo! / Policeman holdin' my hand!' " Recently, he wrote a story just for her that involved what he calls "telescoping"—a fusion of the spiritual and the diurnal "that I'm trying to do in the plays." The tale starts off in Seattle with a little girl who won't go to bed. "My aunt in Africa will grant you a wish if you will go to bed at the proper time," her babysitter says. "O.K.," the little girl says. "My wish is that it be daylight all the time so I never have to go to bed." The story then moves from reality into a fantastical world of sun gods and kings of darkness and chess games where the pieces come alive. "I think it's close to what would be an African-American world view—tree spirits and all those kinds of things," Wilson says. "In this world, you can have a three-hundred-and-sixty-six-year-old woman and you also gotta pay your bills. They exist side by side. They infuse life with a something that lifts it up, almost into another realm. Closer to God." Even Azula understands that her father's undertaking is somehow special and heroic and big in the world. At the Goodman Theatre, catching sight of him as he walked toward her in the lobby, she threw open her arms and said, "August Wilson!" Around that time, she also asked him, "Daddy, why you a writer?" "To tell the story," Wilson said. ♦

FICTION

THAT LAST ODD DAY IN L.A.

BY ANN BEATTIE

Keller went back and forth about going into Cambridge to see Lynn, his daughter, for Thanksgiving. If he went in November, he'd miss his niece and nephew, who made the trip back East only in December, for Christmas. They probably could have got away from their jobs and returned for both holidays, but they never did. The family had gathered for Thanksgiving at his daughter's ever since she moved into her own apartment, which was going on six years now; Christmas dinner was at Keller's sister's house, in Arlington. His daughter's apartment was near Porter Square. She had once lived there with Ray Ceruto, before she decided she was too good for a car mechanic. A nice man, a hard worker, a gentleman—so naturally she chose instead to live in serial monogamy with men Keller found it almost impossible to get along with. Oh, but they had white-collar jobs and white-collar aspirations: with her current boyfriend, she had recently flown to England for all of three days in order to see the white cliffs of Dover. If there had been bluebirds, they had gone unmentioned.

Years ago, Keller's wife, Sue Anne, had moved back to Roanoke, Virginia, where she now rented a "mother-in-law apartment" from a woman she had gone to school with back in the days when she and Keller were courting. Sue Anne joked that she herself had become a sort of ideal mother-in-law, gardening and taking care of the pets when her friends went away. She was happy to have returned to gardening. During the almost twenty years that she and Keller had been together, their little house in the Boston suburbs, shaded by trees, had allowed for the growth of almost nothing but springtime bulbs, and even those had to be planted in raised beds because the soil was of such poor quality. Eventually, the squirrels discovered the beds. Sue Anne's breakdown had had to do with the squirrels.

So: call his daughter, or do the more important thing and call his neighbor and travel agent, Sigrid, at Pleasure Travel, to apologize for their recent, rather uneventful dinner at the local Chinese restaurant, which had been interrupted by a thunderstorm grand enough to announce the presence of Charlton Heston, which had reminded Keller that he'd left his windows open. He probably should not have refused to have the food packed to go. But when he'd thought of having her to his house to eat the dinner—his house was a complete mess—or of going to her house and having to deal with her son's sour disdain, it had seemed easier just to bolt down his food.

A few days after the ill-fated dinner, he had bought six raffle tickets and sent them to her, in the hope that a winning number would provide a bicycle for her son, though he obviously hadn't given her a winning ticket, or she would have called. Her son's expensive bicycle had been taken at knifepoint, in a neighborhood he had promised his mother he would not ride through.

Two or three weeks before, Sigrid and Keller had driven into Boston to see a show at the M.F.A. and afterward had gone to a coffee shop where he had clumsily, stupidly, splashed a cup of tea onto her when he was jostled by a mother with a stroller the size of an infantry vehicle. He had brought dishtowels to the door of the ladies' room for Sigrid to dry herself off with, and he had even—rather gallantly, some might have said—thought to bite the end off his daily vitamin-E capsule from the little packet of multivitamins he carried in his shirt pocket and urged her to scrape the goop from the tip of his finger and spread it on the burn. She maintained that she had not been burned. Later, on the way to the car, they had got into a tiff when he said that it wasn't necessary for her to pretend that everything was fine, that he liked women who spoke honestly. "It could not have been all right that I scalded you, Sigrid," he'd told her.

"Well, I just don't see the need to criticize you over an *accident*, Keller," she had replied. Everyone called him by his last name. He had been born Joseph Francis, but neither Joe nor Joseph nor Frank nor Francis fit.

"It was clumsy of me, and I wasn't quick enough to help," he said.

"You were fine," she said. "It would have brought you more pleasure if I'd cried, or if I'd become irrational, wouldn't it? There's some part of you that's always on guard, because the other person is sure to become *irrational*."

"You know a little something about my wife's personality," he said.

Sigrid had lived next door before, during, and after Sue Anne's departure. "So everyone's your wife?" she said. "Is that what you think?"

"No," he said. "I'm apologizing. I didn't do enough for my wife, either. Apparently I didn't act soon enough or effectively enough or—"

"You're always looking for forgiveness!" she said. "I don't forgive you or not forgive you. How about that? I don't know enough about the situation, but I doubt that you're entirely to blame for the way things turned out."

"I'm sorry," he said. "Some people say I'm too closemouthed and I don't give anyone a chance to know me, and others—such as you or my daughter—maintain that I'm self-critical as a ploy to keep their attention focussed on me."

"I didn't say any such thing! Don't put words in my mouth. I said that my getting tea dumped on my back by accident and the no doubt very complicated relationship you had with your wife really don't—"

"It was certainly too complicated for me," Keller said quietly.

LOUIS STETTNER, FROM "RECENT WORKS" (2000)/BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY

"Stop whispering. If we're going to have a discussion, at least let me hear what you're saying."

"I wasn't whispering," Keller said. "That was just the wheezing of an old man out of steam."

"Now it's your age! I should pity you for your advanced age! What age are you, exactly, since you refer to it so often?"

"You're too young to count that high," he smiled. "You're a young, attractive, successful woman. People are happy to see you walk into the room. When they look up and see me, they see an old man, and they avert their eyes. When I walk into the travel agency, they all but duck into the kneeholes of their desks. That's how we got acquainted, as you recall, since calling on one's neighbors is not the American Way. Only your radiant face met mine with a smile. Everybody else was pretending I wasn't there."

"Listen: are you sure this is where we parked the car?"

"I'm not sure of anything. That's why I had you drive."

"I drove because your optometrist put drops in to dilate your pupils shortly before we left," she said.

"But I'm fine now. At least, my usual imperfect vision has returned. I can drive back," he said, pointing to her silver Avalon. "Too noble a vehicle for me, to be sure, but driving would be the least I could do, after ruining your day."

"Why are you saying that?" she said. "Because you're pleased to think that some little problem has the ability to ruin my day? You are being *impossible*, Keller. And don't whisper that that's exactly what your wife would say. Except that she's a fellow human being occupying planet Earth, I don't *care* about your wife."

She took her key ring out of her pocket and tossed the keys to him.

He was glad he caught them, because she sent them higher into the air than necessary. But he did catch them, and he did remember to step in front of her to hold open her door as he pushed the button to unlock the car. Coming around the back, he saw the PETA bumper sticker her husband had adorned the car with shortly before leaving her for a years-younger Buddhist vegan animal-rights activist.

At least he had worked his way into his craziness slowly, subscribing first to *Smithsonian* magazine and only later to newsletters with pictures of starved, manacled horses and pawless animals with startled eyes—material she was embarrassed to have delivered to the house. In the year before he left, he had worked at the animal-rescue league on weekends. When she told him he was becoming obsessed with the plight of animals at the expense of their marriage and their son, he'd rolled up one of his publications and slapped his palm with it over and over, protesting vehemently, like someone scolding a bad dog. As she recalled, he had somehow turned the conversation to the continued illegal importation of elephant tusks into Asia.

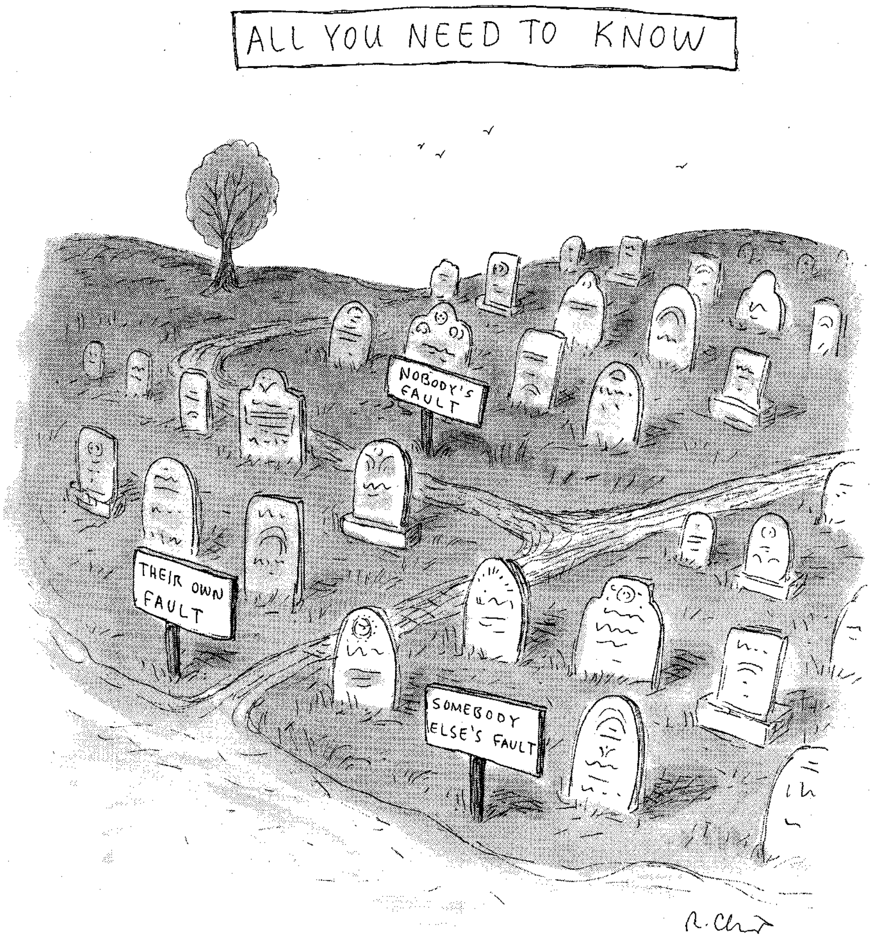
"You always want to get into a fight," she said, when she finally spoke again, as Keller wound his way out of Boston. "It makes it difficult to be with you."

"I know it's difficult. I'm sorry."

"Come over and we can watch some Perry Mason reruns," she said. "It's on every night at eleven."

"I don't stay up that late," he said. "I'm an old man."

Keller spoke to his daughter on the phone—the first time the phone had rung in days—and listened patiently while she set forth her conditions, living her life in the imperative. In advance of their speaking, she wanted him to know that she would hang up if he asked when she intended to break up with Addison (Addison!) Page. Also, as he well knew, she did not want to be questioned about her mother, even though, yes, they were in phone contact. She also did not want to hear any criticism of her glamorous life, based on her recently having spent three days in England with her spendthrift boyfriend, and also, yes, she had got her flu shot.



"This being November, would it be possible to ask who you're going to vote for?"

"No," she said. "Even if you were voting for the same candidate, you'd find some way to make fun of me."

"What if I said, 'Close your eyes and imagine either an elephant or a donkey'?"

"If I close my eyes, I see . . . I see a horse's ass, and it's you," she said. "May I continue?"

He snorted. She had a quick wit, his daughter. She had got that from him, not from his wife, who neither made jokes nor understood them. In the distant past, his wife had found an entirely humorless psychiatrist who had summoned Keller and urged him to speak to Sue Anne directly, not in figurative language or through allusions or—God forbid—with humor. "What should I do if I'm just chomping at the bit to tell a racist joke?" he had asked. The idea was of course ludicrous; he had never made a racist joke in his life. But of course the psychiatrist missed his tone. "You anticipate the necessity of telling racist jokes to your wife?" he had said, pausing to scribble something on his pad. "Only if one came up in a dream or something," Keller had deadpanned.

"I thought you were going to continue, Lynn," he said. "Which I mean as an observation, not as a reproach," he hurried to add.

"Keller," she said (since her teenage years, she had called him Keller), "I need to know whether you're coming to Thanksgiving."

"Because you would get a turkey weighing six or seven ounces more?"

"In fact, I thought about cooking a ham this year, because Addison prefers ham. It's just a simple request, Keller: that you let me know whether or not you plan to come. Thanksgiving is three weeks away."

"I've come up against Amy Vanderbilt's timetable for accepting a social invitation at Thanksgiving?" he said.

She sighed deeply. "I would like you to come, whether you believe that or not, but since the twins aren't coming from L.A., and since Addison's sister invited us to her house, I thought I might not cook this year, if you didn't intend to come."

"Oh, by all means don't cook for me. I'll mind my manners and call fifty-one weeks from today and we'll set this up for next year," he said. "A turkey potpie from the grocery store is good enough for me."

"And the next night you could be your usual frugal self and eat the leftover packaging," she said.

"Horses don't eat cardboard. You're thinking of mice," he said.

"I stand corrected," she said, echoing the sentence he often said to her. "But let me ask you another thing. Addison's sister lives in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and she issued a personal invitation for you to join us at her house for dinner. Would you like to have Thanksgiving there?"

"How could she issue a personal invitation if she's never met me?" he said.

"Stop it," his daughter said. "Just answer."

He thought about it. Not about whether he would go but about the holiday itself. The revisionist thinking on Thanksgiving was that it commemorated the subjugation of the Native Americans (formerly the Indians). Not as bad a holiday as Columbus Day, but still.

"I take it your silence means that you prefer to be far from the maddening crowd," she said.

"That title is much misquoted," he said. "Hardy's novel is 'Far from the Madding Crowd,' which has an entirely different connotation, 'madding' meaning frenzied. There's quite a difference between 'frenzied' and 'annoying.' Consider, for instance, your mother's personality versus mine."

"You are *incredibly* annoying," Lynn said. "If I didn't know that you cared for me, I couldn't bring myself to pick up the phone and let myself in for your mockery, over and over."

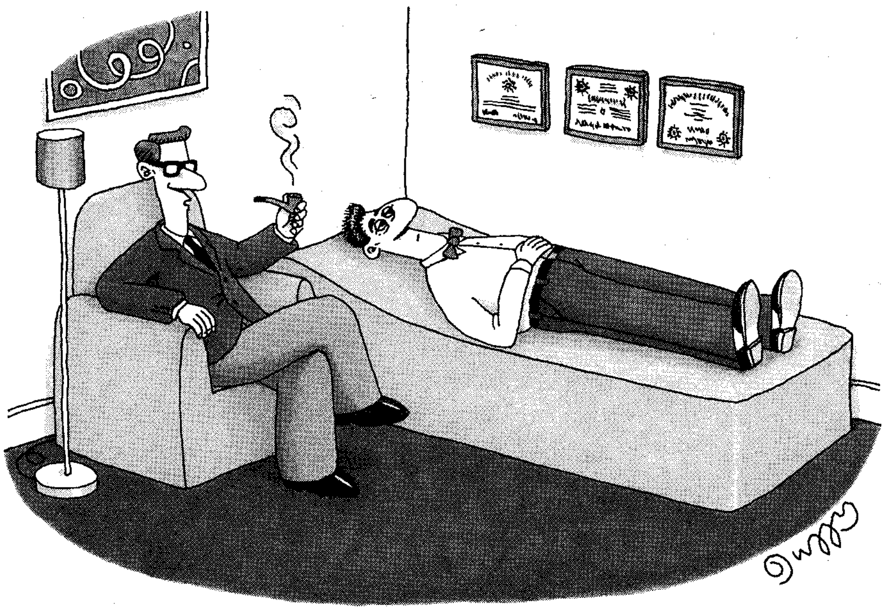
"I thought it was because you pitied me."

He heard the click, and there was silence. He replaced the phone in its cradle, which made him think of another cradle—Lynn's—with the decal of the cow jumping over the moon on the headboard and blue and pink beads (the cradle manufacturer having hedged his bets) on the rails. He could remember spinning the beads and watching Lynn sleep. The cradle was now in the downstairs hallway, used to store papers and magazines for recycling. Over the years, some of the decal had peeled away, so that on last inspection only a torso with two legs was successfully making the jump over the brightly smiling moon.

He bought a frozen turkey potpie and, as a treat to himself (it was not true that he constantly denied himself happiness, as Lynn said—one could not deny what was rarely to be found), a new radio whose FM quality was excellent—though what did he know, with his imperfect hearing? As he ate Thanksgiving dinner (two nights before Thanksgiving, but why stand on formality?—a choice of Dinty Moore beef stew or Lean Cuisine vegetable lasagna remained for the day of thanks itself), he listened with pleasure to Respighi's "Pini di Roma." He and Sue Anne had almost gone to Rome on their honeymoon, but instead they had gone to Paris. His wife had just finished her second semester of college, where she had declared herself an art-history major. They had gone to the Louvre and to the Jeu de Paume and on the last day of the trip he had bought her a little watercolor of Venice she kept admiring, in a rather elaborate frame that probably accounted for the gouache's high price—it was a gouache, not a watercolor, as she always corrected him. They both wanted three children, preferably a son followed by either another son or a daughter, though if their second child was a son, then of course they would devoutly wish their last to be a daughter. He remembered with bemusement the way they had prattled on, strolling by the Seine, earnestly discussing those things that were most out of their control: Life's Important Matters.

Sue Anne conceived only once, and although they (she, to be honest) had vaguely considered adoption, Lynn remained their only child. Lacking brothers and sisters, she had been fortunate to grow up among relatives, because Keller's sister had given birth to twins a year or so after Lynn was born, and in those days the two families lived only half an hour apart and saw each other almost every weekend. Now Sue Anne and his sister Carolynne (now merely Carol), who lived in Arlington with her doctor husband (or who lived apart from him—he was forbidden to inquire about the status of their union), had not spoken for months, and the twins, Richard and Rita, who worked as stockbrokers and had never married—smart!—and shared a house in the Hollywood Hills, were more at ease with him than his own daughter was. For years Keller had promised to visit the twins, and the previous summer, Richard had called his bluff and sent him a ticket to Los Angeles. Richard and Rita had picked Keller up at LAX in a BMW convertible and taken him to a sushi restaurant where at periodic intervals laser images on the wall blinked on and off like sexually animated hieroglyphics dry-humping to a recording of "Walk Like an Egyptian." The next morning, the twins had taken him to a museum that had been created as a satire of museums, with descriptions of the bizarre exhibits which were so tongue-in-cheek he was sure the majority of people there thought that they were touring an actual museum. That night, they turned on the lights in their pool and provided him with bathing trunks (how would he have thought to pack such a thing?—he never thought of a visit to sprawling Los Angeles as a visit to a *beach*), and on Sunday they had eaten their lunch of fresh pineapple and prosciutto poolside, drinking prosecco instead of mineral water (the only beverages in the house, except for extraordinarily good red wine, as far as he could tell), and in the late afternoon they had been joined by a beautiful blond woman who had apparently been, or might still be, Jack Nicholson's lover. Then he went with Rita and Richard to a screening (a shoot-'em-up none of them wanted to see, though the twins felt they must, because the cinematographer was their longtime client), and on Monday they had sent a car to the house so Keller wouldn't get lost trying to find his way around the freeways. It transported him to a lunch with the twins at a restaurant built around a beautiful terraced garden, after which he'd been dropped off to take the M-G-M tour and then picked up by the same driver—a dropout from Hollywood High who was working on a screenplay.

It was good they had bought him a ticket for only a brief visit, because if he'd stayed longer he might never have gone home. Though who would have cared if he hadn't? His wife didn't care where he lived, as long as she lived in the opposite direction. His daughter might



"We don't use the word 'crazy' in this office, Mr. Channing. Everywhere else, sure, but not here."

• •

be relieved that he had moved away. He lived where he lived for no apparent reason—at least, no reason apparent to him. He had no friends, unless you called Don Kim a friend—Don, with whom he played handball on Mondays and Thursdays. And his accountant, Ralph Bazzorocco. He supposed Bazzorocco was his friend, though with the exception of a couple of golf games each spring and the annual buffet dinner he and Bazzorocco's other clients were invited to every April 16th—and except for Bazzorocco's calling to wish him a happy birthday, and "Famiglia Bazzorocco" (as the gift card always read) sending him an enormous box of biscotti and Baci at Christmas . . . oh, he didn't know. Probably that was what friendship was, he thought, a little ashamed of himself. He had gone to the hospital to visit Bazzorocco's son after the boy injured his pelvis and lost his spleen playing football. He'd driven Bazzorocco's weeping wife home in the rain so she could shower and change her clothes, then driven her, still weeping, back to the hospital. O.K.: he had friends. But would any of them care if he lived in Los Angeles? Don Kim could easily find another partner (perhaps a younger man more worthy as a competitor); Bazzorocco could remain his accountant via the miracle of modern technology. In any case, Keller had returned to the North Shore.

Though not before that last odd day in L.A. He had said, though he hadn't planned to say it (Lynn was not correct in believing that everything that escaped his lips was premeditated), that he'd like to spend his last day lounging around the house. So they wouldn't feel too sorry for him, he even asked if he could open a bottle of Merlot—whatever they recommended, of course—and raid their refrigerator for lunch. After all, the refrigerator contained a tub of mascarpone instead of cottage cheese, and the fruit drawer was stocked with organic plums rather than puckered supermarket grapes. Richard wasn't so keen on the idea, but Rita said that of course that was fine. It was *Keller's* vacation, she stressed. They'd make a reservation at a restaurant out at the beach that night, and if he felt rested enough to eat out, fine; if not, they'd cancel the reservation and Richard would cook his famous chicken breasts marinated in Vidalia-onion sauce.

When Keller woke up, the house was empty. He made coffee (at home, he drank instant) and wandered out through the open doors to the patio as it brewed. He surveyed the hillside, admired the lantana growing from Mexican pottery urns flanking one side of the pool. Some magazine had been rained on—it must have rained during the night; he hadn't heard it, but then, he'd fallen asleep with earphones on, listening to Brahms. He walked toward the magazine—as offensive as litter along the highway, this copy of *Vogue* deteriorating on the green tiles—then drew back, startled. There was a small possum: a baby possum, all snout and pale narrow body, clawing the water, trying futilely to scramble up the edge of the pool. He looked around quickly for the pool net. The night before, it had been leaning against the sliding glass door, but it was no longer there. He went quickly to the side of the house, then ran to the opposite side, all the while acutely aware that the drowning possum was in desperate need of rescue. No pool net. He went into the kitchen, which was now suffused with the odor of coffee, and threw open door after door looking for a pot. He finally found a bucket containing cleaning supplies, quickly removed them, then ran back to the pool, where he dipped the bucket in, missing, frightening the poor creature and adding to its problems by making it go under. He recoiled in fear, then realized that the emotion he felt was not fear but self-loathing. Introspection was not his favorite mode, but no matter: he dipped again, leaning farther over this time, accepting the ludicrous prospect of his falling in, though the second time he managed to scoop up the possum—it was only a tiny thing—and lift it out of the water. The bucket was full, because he had dipped deep, and much to his dismay, when he saw the possum curled up at the bottom, he knew immediately that it was already dead. The possum had drowned. He set the bucket down and crouched on the tile beside it before he had a second, most welcome epiphany and realized almost with a laugh that it wasn't dead: it was playing possum. Though if he didn't get it out of the bucket, it really would drown. He jumped up, turned the bucket on its side, and stood back as water and possum flowed out. The water dispersed. The possum lay still. That must be because he was watching it, he decided, although he once more considered the grim possibility that it was dead.

He stood still. Then he thought to walk back into the house, far away from it. It was dead; it wasn't. Time passed. Then, finally, as he stood unmoving, the possum twitched and waddled off—the flicker of life in its body resonated in Keller's own heart—and then the event was over. He continued to stand there, cognizant of how much he had loathed himself just moments before. Then he went out to retrieve the bucket. As he grasped the handle, tears welled up in his eyes. What the hell! He cried at the sink as he rinsed the bucket.

He dried his eyes on the crook of his arm and washed the bucket thoroughly, much longer than necessary, then dried it with a towel. He put the Comet, the Windex, and the rag and the brush back inside and returned the bucket to its place under the sink and tried to remember what he had planned to do that day, and again he was overwhelmed. The image that popped into his mind was of Jack Nicholson's girlfriend, the blonde in the bikini with the denim shirt thrown over it. He thought . . . what? That he was going to get together with Jack Nicholson's girlfriend? Whose last name he didn't even know?

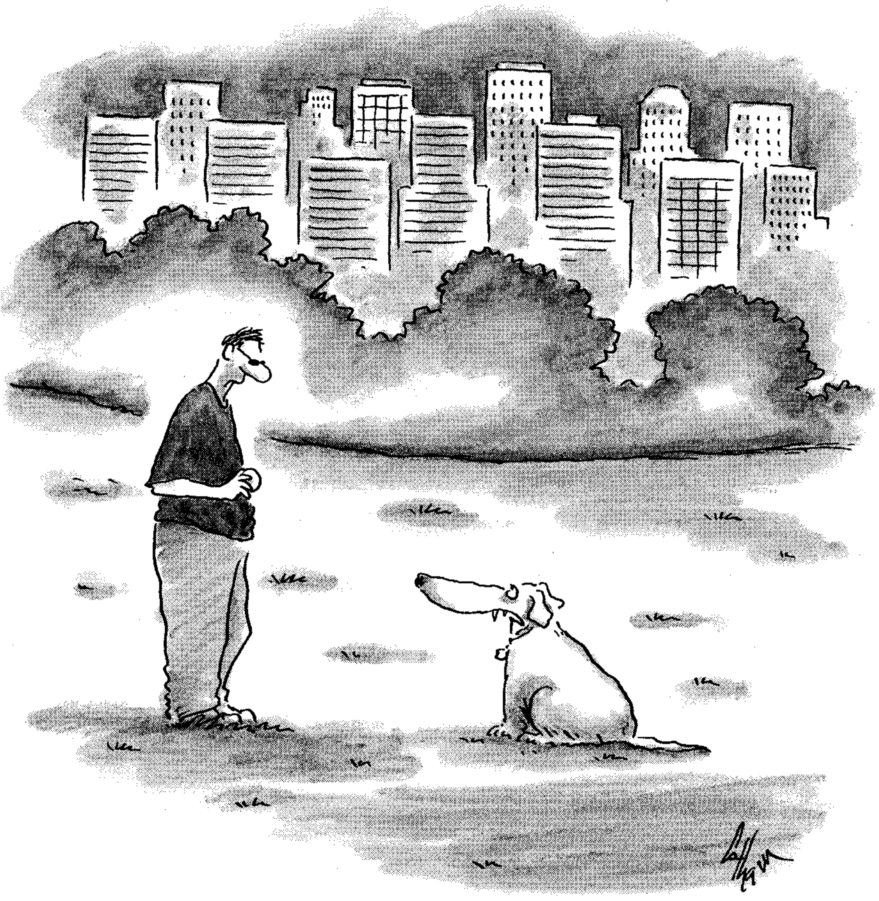
But that *had* been what he was thinking. No way to act on it, but yes—that was what he had been thinking, all along.

The water had run off, though the tiles still glistened. No sign, of course, of the possum. It was doubtless off assimilating its important life lesson. On a little redwood table was a waterproof radio that he turned on, finding the classical station, adjusting the volume. Then he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his fly, stepped out of his pants and underpants, and took off his shirt. Carrying the radio, he walked to the deep end of the pool, placed the radio on the rim and dove in. He swam underwater for a while, and then, as his head broke the surface, he had the distinct feeling that he was being watched. He looked back at the house, then looked slowly around the pool area. The fence that walled it off from the neighbors was at least ten feet high. Behind the pool, the terrace was filled with bushes and fruit trees and pink and white irises—Keller was crazy: he was alone in a private compound; no one was there. He went under the water again, refreshed by its silky coolness, and breaststroked to the far end, where he came up for air, then used his feet to push off the side of the pool so he could float on his back. When he reached the end, he pulled himself out, then saw, in the corner of his eye, who was watching him. High up on the terrace, a deer was looking down. The second their eyes met, the deer was gone, but in that second it had come clear to him—on this day of endless revelations—that the deer had been casting a beneficent look, as if in thanks. He had felt that: that a deer was acknowledging and thanking him. He was flabbergasted at the odd workings of his brain. How could a grown man—a grown man without any religious beliefs, a father who, in what now seemed like a different lifetime, had accompanied his little daughter to "Bambi" and whispered, as every parent does, "It's only a movie," when Bambi's mother was killed . . . how could a man with such knowledge of the world, whose most meaningful accomplishment in as long as he could remember had been to fish an animal out of a swimming pool—how could such a man feel unequivocally that a deer had appeared to bless him?

But he knew it had.

As it turned out, the blessing hadn't exactly changed his life, though why should one expect so much of blessings, just because they were blessings?

Something that *had* profoundly changed his life had been Richard's urging him, several years before, to take a chance, take a gamble, trust him, because the word he was about to speak was going to change his life. "Plastics?" he'd said, but Richard was too young: he hadn't seen the movie. No, the word had been "Microsoft." Keller had been in a strange frame of mind that day (one month earlier, to the day, his father had killed himself). At that point, he had hated his job so much, had stopped telling half-truths and finally admitted to Sue Anne that their marriage had become a dead end, that he assumed he was indulging the self-destructiveness his wife and daughter always maintained was the core of his being when he turned over almost everything he had to his nephew to invest in a company whose very name suggested smallness and insubstantiality. But, as it turned out, Richard had blessed him, as had the deer, now. The blonde had not, but then, very few men, very few indeed, would ever be



"Do you mind if I chase a few practice balls first?"

lucky enough to have such a woman give them her benediction.

"You're *fun!*" Rita laughed, dropping him off at LAX. On the way, he had taken off his white T-shirt and raised it in the air, saying, "I hereby surrender to the madness that is the City of Angels." It had long been Rita's opinion that no one in the family understood her uncle; that all of them were so defensive that they were intimidated by his erudition and willfully misunderstood his sense of humor. Richard was working late, but he had sent, by way of his sister (she ran back to the car, having almost forgotten the treat in the glove compartment), a tin of white-chocolate brownies to eat on the plane, along with a note Keller would later read that thanked him for having set an example when he and Rita were kids, for not unthinkingly going with the flow, and for his wry pronouncements in a family where, Richard said, everyone else was "afraid of his own shadow." "Come back soon," Richard had written. "We miss you."

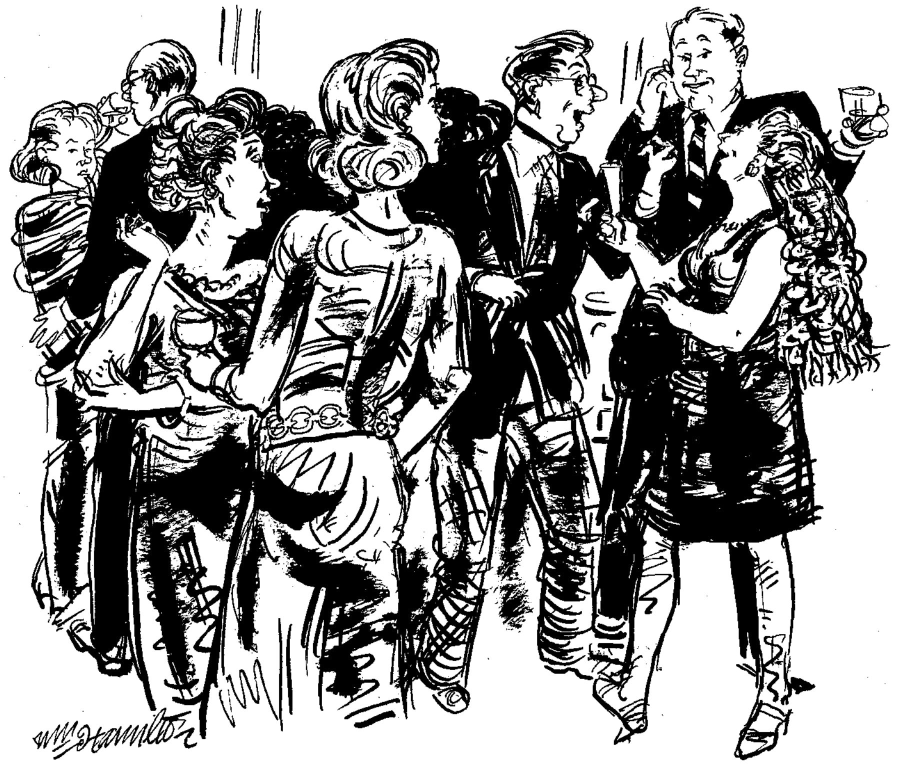
Back home, on the telephone, his daughter had greeted him with a warning: "I don't want to hear about my cousins who are happy and successful, which are synonymous, in your mind, with being rich. Spare me details of their life and just tell me what you did. I'd like to hear about your trip without feeling diminished by my insignificance in the face of my cousins' perfection."

"I can leave them out of it entirely," he said. "I can say, quite honestly, that the most significant moment of my trip happened not in their company but in the meeting of my eyes with the eyes of a deer that looked at me with indescribable kindness and understanding."

Lynn snorted. "This was on the freeway, I suppose? It was on its way to be an extra in a remake of 'The Deer Hunter'?"

He had understood, then, the urge she so often felt when speaking to him—the urge to hang up on a person who had not even tried to understand one word you had said.

"How was your Thanksgiving?" Sigrid asked. Keller was sitting across from her at the travel agency, arranging to buy Don Kim's stepdaughter a ticket to Germany so she could pay a final visit to her dying friend. The girl was dying of A.L.S. The details were too terrible to think about. Jennifer had known her for eleven of her seventeen years, and now the girl was dying. Don Kim barely made it from paycheck to paycheck. It had been necessary to tell Don that he had what he called "a considerable windfall from the eighties stock market" in order to persuade him that in offering to buy Jennifer a ticket, he was not making a gesture he could not afford. He had had to work hard to persuade him. He had to insist on it several times, and swear that in no way had he thought Don had been hinting (which was true). The only worry was how Jennifer would handle such a trip, but they had both agreed she was a very mature girl.



"She's too old for her hair."

"Very nice," Keller replied. In fact, that day he had eaten canned stew and listened to Albinoni (probably some depressed d.j. who hadn't wanted to work Thanksgiving night). He had made a fire in the fireplace and caught up on his reading of *The Economist*. He felt a great distance between himself and Sigrid. He said, trying not to sound too perfunctorily polite, "And yours?"

"I was actually . . ." She dropped her eyes. "You know, my ex-husband has Brad for a week at Thanksgiving and I have him for Christmas. He's such a big boy now, I don't know why he doesn't put his foot down, but he doesn't. If I knew then what I know now, I'd never have let him go, no matter what rights the court gave that lunatic. You know what he did before Thanksgiving? I guess you must not have read the paper. They recruited Brad to liberate turkeys. They got arrested. His father thinks that's fine: traumatizing Brad, letting him get hauled into custody. And the worst of it is, Brad's scared to death, but he doesn't dare *not* go along, and then he has to pretend to me that he thinks it was a great idea, that I'm an indifferent—" She searched for the word. "That I'm subhuman because I eat dead animals."

Keller had no idea what to say. Lately, things didn't seem funny enough to play off of. Everything just seemed weird and sad. Sigrid's ex-husband had taken their son to liberate turkeys. How could you extemporize about that?

"She could go Boston, London, Frankfurt on British Air," Sigrid said, as if she hadn't expected him to reply. "It would be somewhere around seven hundred and fifty." She hit the keyboard again. "Seven eighty-nine plus taxes," she said. "She'd be flying out at 6 P.M.

Eastern Standard, she'd get there midmorning." Her fingers stopped moving on the keyboard. She looked at him.

"Can I use your phone to make sure that's a schedule that's good for her?" he said. He knew that Sigrid wondered who Jennifer Kim was. He had spoken of her as "my friend, Jennifer Kim."

"Of course," she said. She pushed a button and handed him the phone. He had written the Kims' telephone number on a little piece of paper and slipped it in his shirt pocket. He was aware that she was staring at him as he dialled. The phone rang three times, and then he got the answering machine. "Keller here," he said. "We've got the itinerary, but I want to check it with Jennifer. I'm going to put my travel agent on," he said. "She'll give you the times, and maybe you can call her to confirm it. O.K.?" He handed the phone to Sigrid. She took it, all business. "Sigrid Crane of Pleasure Travel, Ms. Kim," she said. "I have a British Airways flight that departs Logan at six zero zero P.M., arrival into Frankfurt by way of London nine five five A.M. My direct line is—"

He looked at the poster of Bali framed on the wall. A view of water. Two people entwined in a hammock. Pink flowers in the foreground.

"Well," she said, hanging up. "I'll expect to hear from her. I assume I should let you know if anything changes?"

He cocked his head. "What doesn't?" he said. "You'd be busy every second of the day if you did that."

She looked at him, expressionless. "The ticket price," she said. "Or shall I issue it regardless?"

"Regardless." (Now, there was a word he didn't use often!) "Thanks." He stood.

"Say hello to my colleagues hiding under their desks on your way out," she said.

In the doorway, he stopped. "What did they do with the turkeys?" he said.

"They took them by truck to a farm in Vermont where they thought they wouldn't be killed," she said. "You can read about it in yesterday's paper. Everybody's out on bail. Since it's a first offense, my son might be able to avoid having a record. I've hired a lawyer."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Thank you," she said.

He nodded. Unless she had two such garments, she was wearing the same gray sweater he had spilled tea on. It occurred to him that, outside his family, she was the only woman he spoke to. The woman at the post office, women he encountered when running errands, the U.P.S. delivery person, who he personally thought might be a hermaphrodite, but in terms of real female acquaintances, Sigrid was the only one. He should have said more to her about the situation with her ex-husband and son, though he could not imagine what he would have said. He also could not get a mental picture, humorous or otherwise, of liberated turkeys, walking around some frozen field in—where had she said? Vermont.

She took an incoming call. He glanced back at the poster, at Sigrid sitting there in her gray sweater, noticing for the first time that she wore a necklace dangling a silver cross. Her high cheekbones, accentuated by her head tipped forward, were her best feature; her worst feature was her eyes, a bit too close together, so that she always seemed slightly perplexed. He raised his hand to indicate goodbye, in case she might be looking, then realized from what he heard Sigrid saying that the person on the other end must be Don Kim's stepdaughter; Sigrid was reciting the Boston to Frankfurt schedule, tapping her pen as she spoke. He hesitated, then went back and sat down, though Sigrid had not invited him back. He sat there while Jennifer Kim told Sigrid the whole sad story—what else could the girl have been saying to her for so long? Sigrid's eyes were almost crossed when she finally glanced up at him, then put her fingers on the keyboard and began to enter information. "I might stop by tonight," he said quietly, rising. She nodded, talking into the telephone headset while typing quickly.

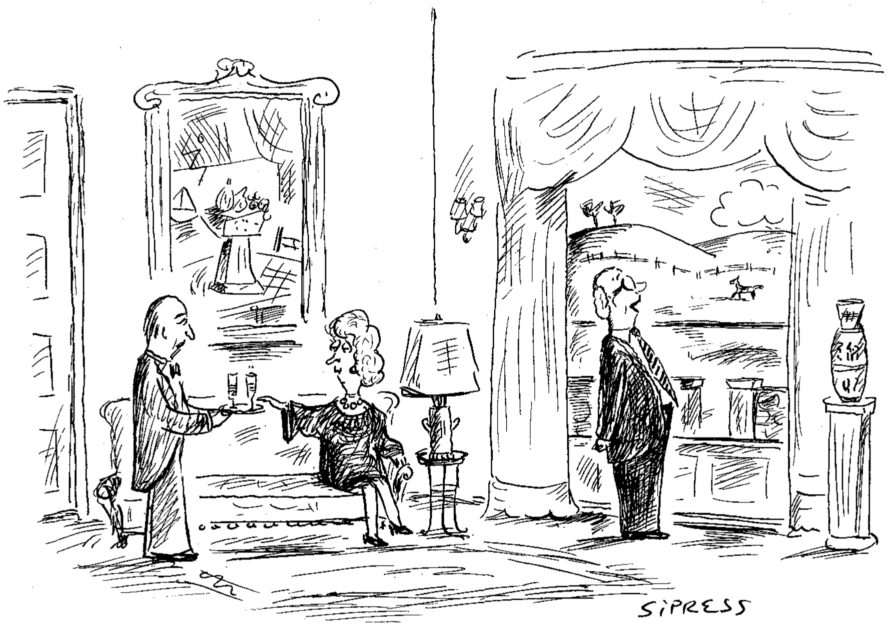
Exiting, he thought of a song Groucho Marx had sung in some movie which had the lyrics "Did you ever have the feeling that you wanted to go, and still you had the feeling that you wanted to stay?" He had a sudden mental image of Groucho with his cigar clamped in his teeth (or perhaps it had been Jimmy Durante who sang the song?), and then Groucho's face evaporated and only the cigar remained, like a moment in "Alice in Wonderland." And then—although Keller had quit smoking years before, when his father died—he stopped at a convenience store and bought a pack of cigarettes and smoked one, driving home, listening to some odd space-age music. He drove through Dunkin' Donuts and got two plain doughnuts to have with coffee as he watched the evening news, remembering the many times Sue Anne had criticized him for eating food without a plate, as if dropped crumbs were proof that your life was about to go out of control.

In his driveway, he saw that his trash can had been knocked over, the plastic bag inside split open, the lid halfway across the yard. He looked out the car window at the rind of a melon, then at the bloody Kleenex he'd held to his chin when he'd nicked himself shaving—he had taken to shaving before turning in, to save time in the morning, now that his beard no longer grew so heavily—as well as issues of *The Economist* that a better citizen would have bundled together for recycling. He turned off the ignition and stepped out of the car, into the wind, to deal with the mess.

As he gathered it up, he felt as if someone were watching him. He looked up at the house. Soon after Sue Anne left, he had taken down not only the curtains but the blinds as well, liking clear, empty windows that people could go ahead and stare into, if such ordinary life was what they found fascinating. A car passed by—a blue van new to this road, though in the past few weeks he'd seen it often—as he was picking up a mealy apple. Maybe a private detective stalking him, he thought. Someone his wife had hired, to see whether another woman was living in the house. He snatched up the last of the garbage and stuffed it in the can, intending to come out later to rebag it. He wanted to get out of the wind. He planned to eat one of the doughnuts before the six-o'clock news.

Sigrid's son was sitting with his back against the storm door, his knees drawn in tight to his chest, smoking a cigarette. Keller was startled to see him, but did his best to appear unfazed, stopping on the walkway to extract a cigarette of his own from the pack in his pocket. "Can I trouble you for a light?" he said to the boy.

It seemed to work. Brad looked taken aback that Keller wasn't more taken aback. So much so that he held out the lighter with a trembling hand. Keller



"I feel so good today I could almost turn down a tax cut."

• •

towered above him. The boy was thin and short (time would take care of one, if not the other); Keller was just over six feet, with broad shoulders and fifteen or twenty pounds more than he should have been carrying, which happened to him every winter. He said to the boy, "Is this a social call, or did I miss a business appointment?"

The boy hesitated. He missed the humor. He mumbled, "Social."

Keller hid his smile. "Allow me," he said, stepping forward. The boy scrambled up and stepped aside so Keller could open the door. Keller sensed a second's hesitation, though Brad followed him in.

It was cold inside. Keller turned the heat down to fifty-five when he left the house. The boy wrapped his arms around his shoulders. The stub of the cigarette was clasped between his second and third fingers. There was a leather bracelet on his wrist, as well as the spike of some tattoo.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" Keller said.

"Do you . . ." The boy was preoccupied, looking around the room.

"Have an ashtray? I use cups for that," Keller said, handing him the mug from which he'd drunk his morning coffee. He had run out of milk, so he'd had it black. And damn—he had yet again forgotten to get milk. The boy stubbed out his cigarette in the mug without taking it in his hands. Keller set it back on the table, tapping off the ash from his own cigarette. He gestured to a chair, which the boy walked to and sat down.

"Do you, like, work or anything?" the boy blurted out.

"I'm the idle rich," Keller said. "In fact, I just paid a visit to your mother, to get a ticket to Germany. For a friend, not for me," he added. "That being the only thing on my agenda today, besides reading the *Wall Street Journal*"—he had not heard about the boy's arrest because he never read the local paper, but he'd hesitated to say that to Sigrid—"and once again forgetting to bring home milk."

Keller sat on the sofa.

"Would you not tell my mother I came here?" the boy said.

"O.K.," Keller said. He waited.

"Were you ever friends with my dad?" the boy asked.

"No, though once we both donated blood on the same day, some years ago, and sat in adjacent chairs." It was true. For some reason, he had never told Sigrid about it. Not that there was very much to say.

The boy looked puzzled, as if he didn't understand the words Keller had spoken.

"My dad said you worked together," the boy said.

"Why would I lie?" Keller said, leaving open the question: Why would your father?

Again, the boy looked puzzled. Keller said, "I taught at the college."

"I was at my dad's over Thanksgiving, and he said you worked the same territory."

In spite of himself, Keller smiled. "That's an expression," Keller said. "Like 'I cover the waterfront.' "

"Cover what?" the boy said.

"If he said we 'worked the same territory,' he must have meant that we were up to the same thing. A notion I don't understand, though I do suppose it's what he meant."

The boy looked at his feet. "Why did you buy me the raffle tickets?" he said.

What was Keller supposed to tell him? That he'd done it as an oblique form of apology to his mother for something that hadn't happened, and that he therefore didn't really need to apologize for? The world had changed: here sat someone who'd never heard the expression "worked the same territory." But what, exactly, had been Brad's father's context? He supposed he could ask, though he knew in advance Brad would have no idea what he meant by context.

"I understand Thanksgiving was a pretty bad time for you," Keller said. He added, unnecessarily (though he had no tolerance for people who added things unnecessarily), "Your mother told me."

"Yeah," the boy said.

They sat in silence.

"Why is it you came to see me?" Keller asked.

"Because I thought you were a friend," the boy surprised him by answering.

Keller's eyes betrayed him. He felt his eyebrows rise slightly.

"Because you gave me *six* raffle tickets," the boy said.

Clearly, the boy had no concept of one's being emphatic by varying the expected numbers: one rose instead of a dozen; six chances instead of just one.

Keller got up and retrieved the bag of doughnuts from the hall table. The grease had seeped through and left a glistening smudge on the wood, which he wiped with the ball of his hand. He carried the bag to Brad and lowered it so he could see in. Close up, the boy smelled slightly sour. His hair was dirty. He was sitting with his shoulders hunched. Keller moved the bag forward an inch. The boy shook his head no. Keller folded the top, set the bag on the rug. He walked back to where he'd been sitting.

"If you'd buy me a bike, I'd work next summer and pay you back," Brad blurted out. "I need another bike to get to some places I got to go."

Keller decided against unscrambling the syntax and regarded him. The tattoo seemed to depict a spike with something bulbous at the tip. A small skull, he decided, for no good reason except that these days skulls seemed to be a popular image. There was a pimple on Brad's chin. Miraculously, even to a person who did not believe in miracles, Keller had gone through his own adolescence without ever having a pimple. His daughter had not had similar good luck. She had once refused to go to school because of her bad complexion, and he had made her cry when he'd tried to tease her out of being self-conscious. "Come on," he'd said to her. "You're not Dr. Johnson, with scrofula." His wife, as well as his daughter, had then burst into tears. The following day, Sue Anne had made an appointment for Lynn with a dermatologist.

"Would this be kept secret from your mother?"

"Yeah," the boy said. He wasn't emphatic, though; he narrowed his eyes to see if Keller would agree.

He asked, "Where will you tell her you got the bike?"

"I'll say from my dad."

Keller nodded. "That's not something she might ask him about?" he said.

The boy put his thumb to his mouth and bit the cuticle. "I don't know," he said.

"You wouldn't want to tell her it was in exchange for doing yard work for me next summer?"

"Yeah," the boy said, sitting up straighter. "Yeah, sure, I can do that. I *will*."

It occurred to Keller that Molly Bloom couldn't have pronounced the word *will* more emphatically. "We might even say that I ran into you and suggested it," Keller said.

"Say you ran into me at Scotty's," the boy said. It was an ice-cream store. If that was what the boy wanted him to say, he would. He looked at the bag of doughnuts, expecting that in his newfound happiness the boy would soon reach in. He smiled. He waited for Brad to move toward the bag.

"I threw your trash can over," Brad said.

Keller's smile faded. "What?" he said.

"I was mad when I came here. I thought you were some nut-case friend of my dad's. I know you've been dating my mom."

Keller cocked his head. "So you knocked over my trash can, in preparation for asking me to give you money for a bike?"

"My dad said you were a sleazebag who was dating Mom. You and Mom went to Boston."

Keller had been called many things. Many, many things. But sleazebag had not been among them. It was unexpected, but it stopped just short of amusing him. "And if I *had been* dating Sigrid?" he said. "That would mean you should come over and dump out my trash?"

"I never thought you'd lend me money," Brad mumbled. His thumb was at his mouth again. "I didn't . . . why would I think you'd give me that kind of money, just because you bought twelve bucks' worth of raffle tickets?"

"I'm not following the logic here," Keller said. "If I'm the enemy, why, exactly, did you come to see me?"

"Because I didn't know. I don't know what my father's getting at half the time. My dad's a major nut case, in case you don't know that. Somebody ought to round him up in one of his burlap bags and let him loose far away from here so he can go live with his precious turkeys."

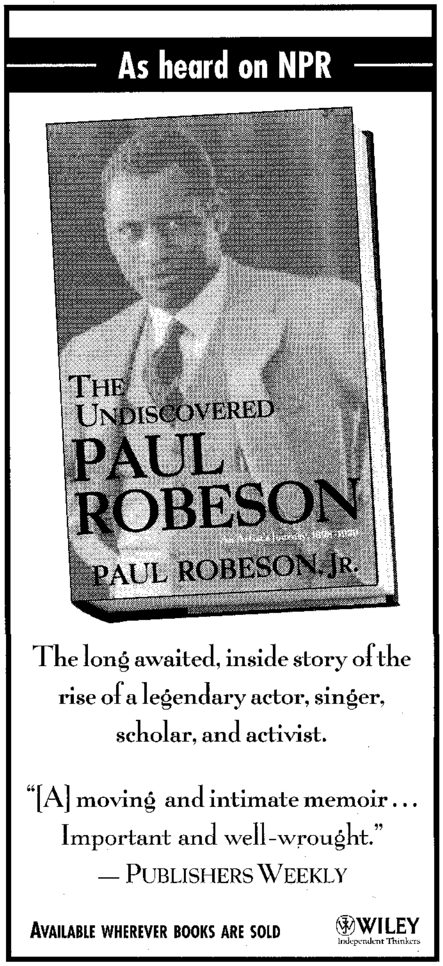
"I can understand your frustration," Keller said. "I'm afraid that with all the world's problems, setting turkeys free doesn't seem an important priority to me."

"Why? Because you had a dad that was a nut case?"

"I'm not understanding," Keller said.

"You said you understood the way I feel. Is it because you had a dad that was nuts, too?"

Keller thought about it. In retrospect, it was clear that his father's withdrawal, the year preceding his death, had been because of depression, not old age. He said, "He was quite a nice man. Hard-working. Religious. Very generous, even though he didn't have much money. He



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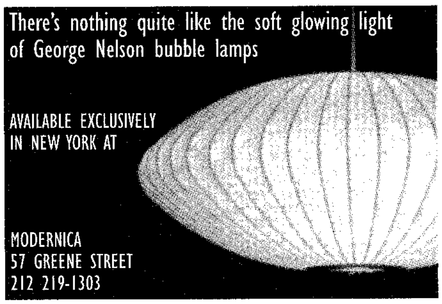

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and my mother had a happy marriage." To his surprise, that sounded right: for years, in revising his father's history, he had assumed that everything had been a façade, but now that he, himself, was older, he tended to think that people's unhappiness was rarely caused by anyone else, or alleviated by anyone else.

"I came here and threw over your trash and ripped up a bush you just planted," Brad said.

The boy was full of surprises.

"I'll replant it," Brad said. He seemed, suddenly, to be on the verge of tears. "The bush by the side of the house," he said tremulously. "There was new dirt around it."

Indeed. Just the bush Keller thought. On a recent morning, after a rain, he had dug up the azalea and replanted it where it would get more sun. It was the first thing he could remember moving in years. He did almost nothing in the yard—had not worked in it, really, since Sue Anne left.

"Yes, I *think* you'll need to do that," he said.

"What if I don't?" the boy said shrilly. His voice had changed entirely.

Keller frowned, taken aback at the sudden turnaround.

"What if I do like I came to do?" the boy said.

Suddenly there was a gun pointed at Keller. A pistol. Pointed right at him, in his living room. And, as suddenly, he was flying through the air before his mind even named the object. It went off as he tackled the boy, wresting the gun from his hand. "You're both fucking nut cases, and you were, too, dating that bitch!" Brad screamed. In that way, because of so much screaming, Keller knew that he had not killed the boy.

The bullet had passed through Keller's forearm. A "clean wound," as the doctor in the emergency room would later say, his expression betraying no awareness of the irony inherent in such a description. With an amazing surge of strength, Keller had pinned the boy to the rug with his good arm as the other bled onto the doughnut bag, and then the struggle was over and Keller did not know what to do. It had seemed they might stay that way forever, with him pinning the boy down, one or the other of them—both of them?—screaming. He somehow used his wounded arm as well as his good arm to pull Brad up and clench him to his side as he dragged the suddenly deadweight, sobbing boy to the telephone and dialled 911. Later, he would learn that he had broken two of the boy's ribs, and that the bullet had missed hitting the bone in his own forearm by fractions of an inch, though the wound required half a dozen surprisingly painful sutures to close.

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"You weren't so much a love child as a spite child."

Keller awaited Sigrid's arrival in the emergency room with dread. His world had already been stood on its head long ago, and he'd developed some fancy acrobatics to stay upright, but Sigrid was just a beginner. He remembered that he had thought about going to her house that very night. It might have been the night he stayed. Everything might have been very different, but it was not. And this thought: if his wife held him accountable for misjudging the importance of their daughter's blemishes, might Sigrid think that, somehow, the violent way things had turned out had been his fault? Among the many things he had been called had been provocative. It was his daughter's favorite word for him. She no longer even tried to find original words to express his shortcomings: he was *provocative*. Even she would not buy the sleazebag epithet. No: he was *provocative*.

In the brightly lit room, they insisted he remain on a gurney. Fluid from a bag was dripping into his arm. Sigrid—there was Sigrid!—wept and wept. Her lawyer accompanied her: a young man with bright-blue eyes and a brow too wrinkled for his years, who seemed too rattled to be in charge of anything. Did he hover the way he did because he was kind, or was there a little something more between him and Sigrid? Keller's not having got involved with Sigrid hadn't spared her any pain, he saw. Once again, he had been instrumental in a woman's abject misery.

Trauma was a strange thing, because you could be unaware of its presence, like diseased cells lurking in your body (a natural enough thought in a hospital) or like bulbs that would break the soil's surface only when stirred in their depths by the penetrating warmth of the sun.

Keller remembered the sun—no, the

moon—of Lynn's cradle. The cradle meant to hold three babies that held only one. He had suggested that Sue Anne, depressed after the birth, return to school, get her degree in art history, teach. He had had a notion of her having colleagues. Friends. Because he was not a very good friend to have. Oh, *sometimes*, sure. It had been a nice gesture to buy a plane ticket for someone who needed to visit a dying friend. How ironic it was, his arranging for that ticket the same day he, himself, might have died.

Sigrid was wearing the gray sweater, the necklace with the cross. Her son had blown apart her world. And Keller was not going to be any help: he would not even consider trying to help her put it together again. All the king's horses, and all the king's men . . . even Robert Penn Warren couldn't put Sigrid together again.

Keller had tried that before: good intentions; good suggestions; and his wife had screamed that whatever she did, it was *never enough*, *never enough*, well, maybe it would be enough if she showed him what strength she possessed—what strength he hadn't depleted with his sarcasm and his comic asides and his endless equivocating—by throwing the lamp on the floor, his typewriter against the wall (the dent was still there), the TV out the window. These thoughts were explained to him later, because he had not been home when she exhibited her significant strength. The squirrels had eaten every bulb. There was not going to be one tulip that would bloom that spring. He suspected otherwise—of course the squirrels had not dug up *every* bulb—but she was in no state of mind to argue with. Besides, there were rules, and his role in the marriage was not to be moderate, it was to be *provocative*. His daughter had said so.

And there she was, his daughter, rushing to his side, accompanied by a nurse: the same person who had once been shown to him swaddled in a pink blanket, now grown almost as tall as he, her face wrinkled then, her face wrinkled now.

"Don't squint," he said. "Put your glasses on. You'll still be pretty."

He stood quickly to show her he was fine, which made the nurse and a doctor who rushed to his side very angry. He said, "I don't have health insurance. I demand to be discharged. The gun got discharged, so it's only fair that I be discharged also."

The nurse said something he couldn't hear. The effort of standing had left him light-headed. Across the room, Sigrid appeared in duplicate and went out of focus. Lynn was negating what he'd just said, informing everyone in a strident voice that of course he had health insurance. The doctor had quite firmly moved him back to his gurney, and now many hands were buckling straps over his chest and legs.

"Mr. Keller," the nurse said, "you lost quite a bit of blood before you got here, and we need you to lie down."

"As opposed to up?" he said.

The doctor, who was walking away, turned. "Keller," he said, "this isn't 'E.R.,' where we'd do anything for you, and the nurse isn't your straight man."

"Clearly not," he said quickly. "She's a woman, we assume."

The doctor's expression did not change. "I knew a wise-ass like you in med school," he said. "He couldn't do the work, so he developed a comedy routine and made a big joke of flunking out. In the end, I became a doctor and he's still talking to himself." He walked away.

Keller was ready with a quick retort, heard it inside his head, but his lips couldn't form the words. What his nearest and dearest had always wished for was now coming true: his terrible talent with words was for the moment suspended. Truly, he was too tired to speak.

The phrase "nearest and dearest" carried him back in time and reminded him of the deer. The deer that had disappeared in the Hollywood Hills. His own guardian angel, appropriately enough a little mangy, with hooves rooting it to the ground, instead of gossamer wings to carry it aloft. And his eyes closed.

When he opened them, Keller saw that his daughter was looking down at him, and nodding slowly, a tentative smile quivering like a parenthesis at the sides of her mouth, a parenthesis he thought might contain the information that, yes, once he had been able to reassure her easily, as she, in believing, had reassured him.

In appreciation, he attempted his best Jack Nicholson smile. ◆

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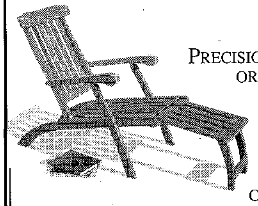

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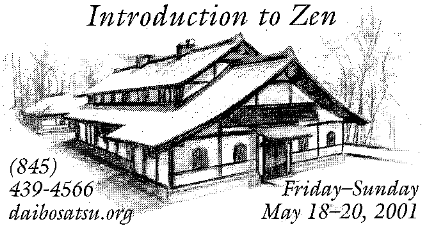

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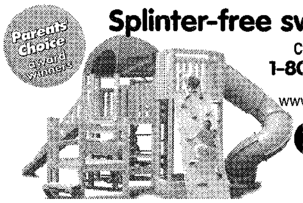

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THE ART WORLD

THE SPHINX

Vermeer's unfathomable appeal.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

What is it about Johannes Vermeer? Everybody idolizes the elusive Dutchman who made silence-drenched small paintings, mostly of unremarkable domestic scenes, in the tidy city of Delft almost three and a half centuries ago. (He died in 1675, at the age of forty-three.) Certainly his work is beautiful, but in unsettling ways that shear away from the subjects of the pictures. The mighty red of the hat in "Girl with a Red Hat" confounds like a shocking comment made in polite company, which only you appear to have heard. The play of sunlight on the collar and cowl of the girl in "Young Woman with a Water Pitcher" also jolts—it could be the secret of life—and when you try to call attention to it you stammer. With Vermeer, our eyes and minds squabble over what we are beholding. Is it image or paint, realism or reality? We may catch the artist out in tricks, noting, for instance, the apparent effects of a camera obscura: variable focus, puddled light, and details whose incredible accuracy owes nothing to painterly tradition. Still, Vermeer beggars analysis. There is a discomfort—a prickling itch—in my experience of him. Looking and looking, I feel I have only begun to look.

Vermeer is at once blatant and ineffable, like the Sphinx. His appeal is both populist and lofty, as if it mixed Norman Rockwell with the music of the spheres. He intoxicates not only art historians and art critics but novelists and poets. I think that our enthusiasm for Vermeer confirms a current trend in taste away from art as a field of educational improvement and toward aesthetic experience as an end in itself. We enjoy the painterly rhetoric of light and color. We don't mind being manipulated by artists—in fact, we require it. We demand to be taken out of ourselves. And no artist erases self-consciousness faster and more ingeniously than Vermeer.

Very little is known about the artist, but in Anthony Bailey's supple new biography, "Vermeer: A View of Delft" (Holt; $27.50), that little goes a long way. Connecting sparse dots, Bailey works up a highly plausible account of the master's life and career. The book perfectly complements a major loan exhibition at the Metropolitan, "Vermeer and the Delft School," which is on view through May 27th and then goes to the National Gallery in London. Included are fifteen of Vermeer's thirty-five generally accepted canvases, masses of work by other artists, and much documentation of seventeenth-century Delft—a lovely walled and canal-watered town of twenty-five thousand. Some Vermeer fans, who might regard the show as nothing but a few jewels packed in tedious scholarly bubble wrap, will plunge directly into the scrums of fellow-viewers around "Woman with a Balance," "The Art of Painting," and the rest. I recommend initial absorption in, at minimum, the works of Carel Fabritius and Pieter de Hooch, painters who are cherishable in their own right and crucial as influences on our hero. Vermeer regularly cribbed motifs from de Hooch in particular.

Bailey begins his account of Vermeer's life with the explosion of about forty-five tons of gunpowder in an arsenal, in 1654. The accident levelled a good bit of Delft and killed Fabritius, a thirty-two-year-old former pupil of Rembrandt, and Delft's best painter. At the Met, an astonishing little Fabritius painting of a goldfinch perched against a yellow wall points straight ahead to the mature style of Vermeer, who was twenty-two in 1654. A eulogistic poem that appeared thirteen years later consoled Delft for the loss of Fabritius by citing "Vermeer, who masterfully trod his path." In some copies of the poem, the last line ends with "who proved to be as great a master." Bailey speculates that personal diplomacy by Vermeer brought about the upgrade. In any case, no one can doubt that the maker of "The Art of Painting"—a masterpiece's masterpiece, showing a painter portraying a model who is done up as Clio, the muse of history—thirsted for glory. Vermeer's only moderately successful career bespeaks a perfectionism that made him the worst enemy of his own ambition, and not just by keeping his output so small. (Bailey reports that Dutch painters then averaged about fifty paintings a year; Vermeer's rate was two or three.) Here was an artist "impatient to be found out, to be seen," Bailey writes, but one so principled that he kept eliminating himself from his art. He became "the person who has just left the room, or who is expected at any moment." Did compunction drive him crazy? In his later years, he painted less often and less well. Having fallen into a state of "decay and decadence"—in the recorded words of his wife, Catharina Bolnes—he suffered some kind of collapse and went "in a day and a half . . . from being healthy to being dead."

The son of an innkeeper who was also an art dealer, Vermeer must have grown up around beer-swilling painters. He became a dealer himself. (The Dutch Golden Age was a commercial operation.) Catharina bore him fifteen children and drew him into her Catholicism—a religion that was intermittently suppressed in Delft at the time. A weird late painting in the show, "Allegory of the Faith," reeks of hysterical piety. It is one of two large, un-Vermeerish Vermeers that bracket the artist's great

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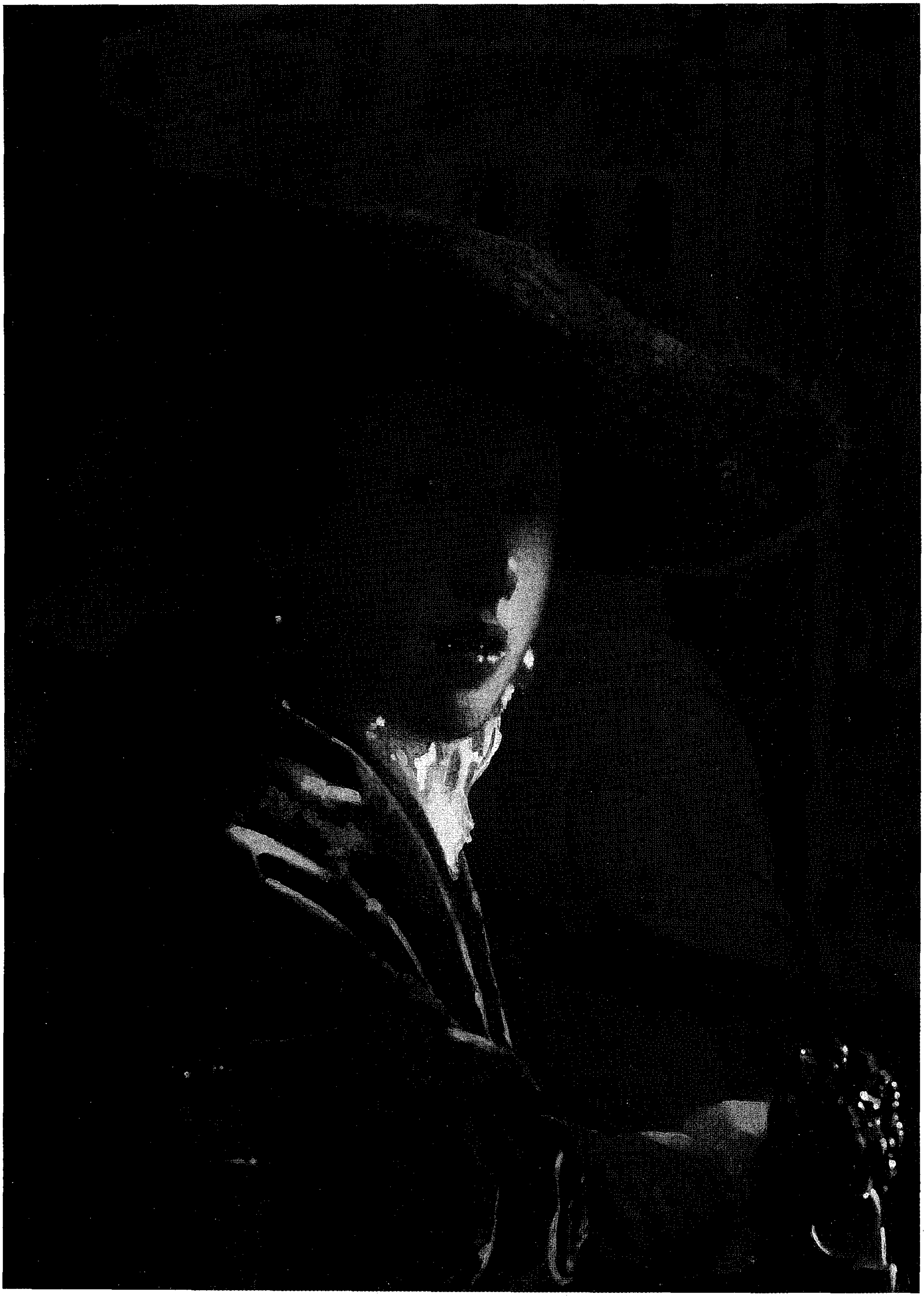

Vermeer's "Girl with a Red Hat": A small, shocking masterpiece by an artist who was impatient to be seen—and not seen.

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THERMAL

The side of the house came away
like a glacier calving,
opening up four floors
in a suck of vertigo:
staircases walking nowhere,
doors going into the air—
the bedroom wallpaper
now clashing with the lawn,
the full-length mirror
mirroring the sky.

The shell is broken
and the building's heat is streaming out;
my camera sees it as a white cloud.
I pick up residuals from the wiring
and the hearth, faint glows
from a sofa and the fogged-up
roll-top bath. It's like cracking open
logs to find fireflies.

I move around the city
looking for the hotspots:
the heat signatures of love,
of too much blood;
one hundred watts at rest, rising
to a thousand *in extremis*.
Blackbodies, glowworms,
ghosts of radiation:
I track and root out heat,
its absorption and emission,
the white bed's infra-red, the bright
spoor of the soul's transmission.

—Robin Robertson

period. The other, done when he was twenty-four, is "The Procuress," an unfamiliar picture from Dresden that shows a lewd cavalier pawing a complacent prostitute as the leering procuress looks on and a lute player (possibly Vermeer himself) hilariously carouses. It is a jumble of elements, some of which are stunning. The abrupt realism of the procuress's face suggests an actual woman looking out through a hole in the canvas, and the sonorous yellow of the prostitute's dress sets off an eruption of beauty. (Isn't Vermeer *the* painter of yellow, just as Rembrandt is of browns, Velázquez of pink and gray, Delacroix of blue-green, and Goya of black? No one else wrings more eloquence from the sunshine hue.) The goatishness of "The Procuress" and the frenzy of "Allegory of the Faith" expose emotions that were thoroughly sublimated in Vermeer's major work, most of which is at once spiritual and erotic.

"The Art of Painting" is a philosophical picture, like Velázquez's nearly contemporaneous "Las Meninas," though on a pocket scale. Sitting with his back to us, the duded-up painter—who, like the lute player in "The Procuress," has shoulder-length brown hair—starts to paint the laurel headdress of the glowing young model, who holds a trombone and a large book. The two are framed on the left by a cluttered table, an empty chair, and drapery whose pattern echoes the leaves in the headdress, both on the model and in the painter's rendering, building the sense of a metaphysical

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laurel grove. The drapery establishes the viewer's space, at a shadowy remove from the scene. Of course, our viewpoint is precisely that of the painter of "The Art of Painting." As we ponder all this, the work melts us with a subtle, plangent triad of the primary colors: yellow book, bluish leaves on the canvas, the painter's red stockings. Vermeer is in the details.

I wonder if the healthy-minded Dutch, while admiring Vermeer's skill, didn't find something intolerably neurotic about him. In any case, his art slipped into an obscurity that was compounded by its scarcity and, later, by tangled misattributions. French enthusiasts rediscovered him in the mid-nineteenth century. Bailey notes Marcel Proust's famous excursion, in 1921, the year before he died, to see the artist's "View of Delft" at the Jeu de Paume. Proust wrote that experience into "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu." The writer Bergotte, who is gravely ill, imagines his own whole life in balance with "a little patch of yellow wall" in the painting. Moments later, he falls dead. It is a literary epiphany like the ignited consciousness of Anna Karenina under the train, though Proust carefully leavens it with irony. (Bergotte's last thought is of undercooked potatoes.) The passage sets a sacramental seal on the art of Vermeer as a shrine of artistic devotion. You would think that veneration so exquisite, verging on the epicene, indicates an object of, well, recherché taste. But anyone with eyes can go goofy over this or that little patch of something in Vermeer.

A skeptical friend of mine surmises that our present Vermeer craze reflects yearnings for legitimacy in today's lately expanded upper middle class. This makes sense. You might say that Vermeer apotheosizes material prosperity—not that he was ever well-off himself. (If only because of that horde of kids underfoot, his golden visions of bourgeois serenity had to be vicarious.) I think that Vermeer's ideal was a classless, timeless truth that is returning to the fore in contemporary culture: the essential role that aesthetic pleasure must play in any seriously lived life. Each of us is born with a capacity to see and feel intensely and with precision. Ultimately, Vermeer's appeal is about nothing other than the realization of that gift. Looking at his pictures, we approach the farthest frontiers of a necessary joy. ♦

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Hitler and history in the dock.

BY IAN BURUMA

The claim that no Jews were gassed at Auschwitz is seldom made in good faith. There are documents and eyewitness accounts by Jewish survivors and former Nazis that put that matter beyond reasonable doubt. And yet some people continue to express doubts about the death camps, and, indeed, the Holocaust in general. David Irving, the British writer of history books, is one of those. To be precise, Irving is not so much an outright Holocaust denier as a Holocaust minimizer. He is convinced that no one was gassed at Auschwitz. He does not deny that many Jews died there, but claims this was mostly from disease. He also concedes that others were shot, in Poland and elsewhere, by overenthusiastic S.S. men, but he has argued that Hitler had nothing to do with this. So no gas, no plan by Hitler, thus no Holocaust. People who remember differently are, in Irving's peculiar phrase, "the Auschwitz Survivors, Survivors of the Holocaust, and Other Liars—A.S.S.H.O.L.E.S."

Such views would hardly matter if Irving were just a crank. In fact, his biographies of Winston Churchill and General Rommel, as well as his books on the Dresden bombing and Hitler's conduct of the war, are highly regarded by respected historians and journalists. Sir John Keegan, the British military historian, declared that "no historian of the Second World War can afford to ignore Irving." Professor Gordon Craig, of Stanford, has praised Irving's book "Hitler's War" as "the best study we have of the German side of the Second World War." Irving is "not just a Fascist historian," the journalist Christopher Hitchens says. "He is also a great historian of Fascism."

These aren't men who subscribe to Irving's quip that "more women died on the back seat of Senator Edward Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than died in the gas chamber at Auschwitz," or believe that Hitler was "probably the biggest friend the Jews had in the 'Third Reich.'" They think David Irving is a wrongheaded but nonetheless important historian, who deserves our attention. This raises two questions. If Irving is as brilliant as his serious admirers claim, why does he believe in such poisonous nonsense? Conversely, if he is not a serious historian, why do serious people esteem him?

Last year's libel suit by David Irving against Deborah Lipstadt, professor of Jewish studies at Emory University, and her British publisher, Penguin, was all about being taken seriously. In her book, "Denying the Holocaust," Lipstadt called Irving "one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial." He is one of several writers, many in the United States, whom Lipstadt attacks as anti-Semitic enemies of the truth. Irving knew from experience that such a reputation would put him well beyond the pale. But if he had won his case, Irving's theories—which he puts across sniggeringly in anti-Semitic company but more soberly in big books, padded with forests of footnotes and references to obscure Nazi archives—would have been given a boost of legitimacy.

In the event, Irving lost. Two new books describe how this happened, and why. "The Holocaust on Trial" (Norton; $23.95), by D. D. Guttenplan, an American journalist, is a mixture of superb reportage and serious reflection—about the role of Jewish identity politics in the United States, anti-Semitism in Britain, the historiography of the Cold War, and so on. In "Lying About Hitler" (Basic; $27), Richard J. Evans, a Cambridge professor of modern history and the star defense witness in the libel trial, provides a book-length version of his demolition job in court. As with Guttenplan, his reflections go beyond the trial itself. If Lipstadt's concern was that Irving was bad for the Jews, Evans wanted to show that he was bad for history, and for historians, too. He sought to prove that one inter-

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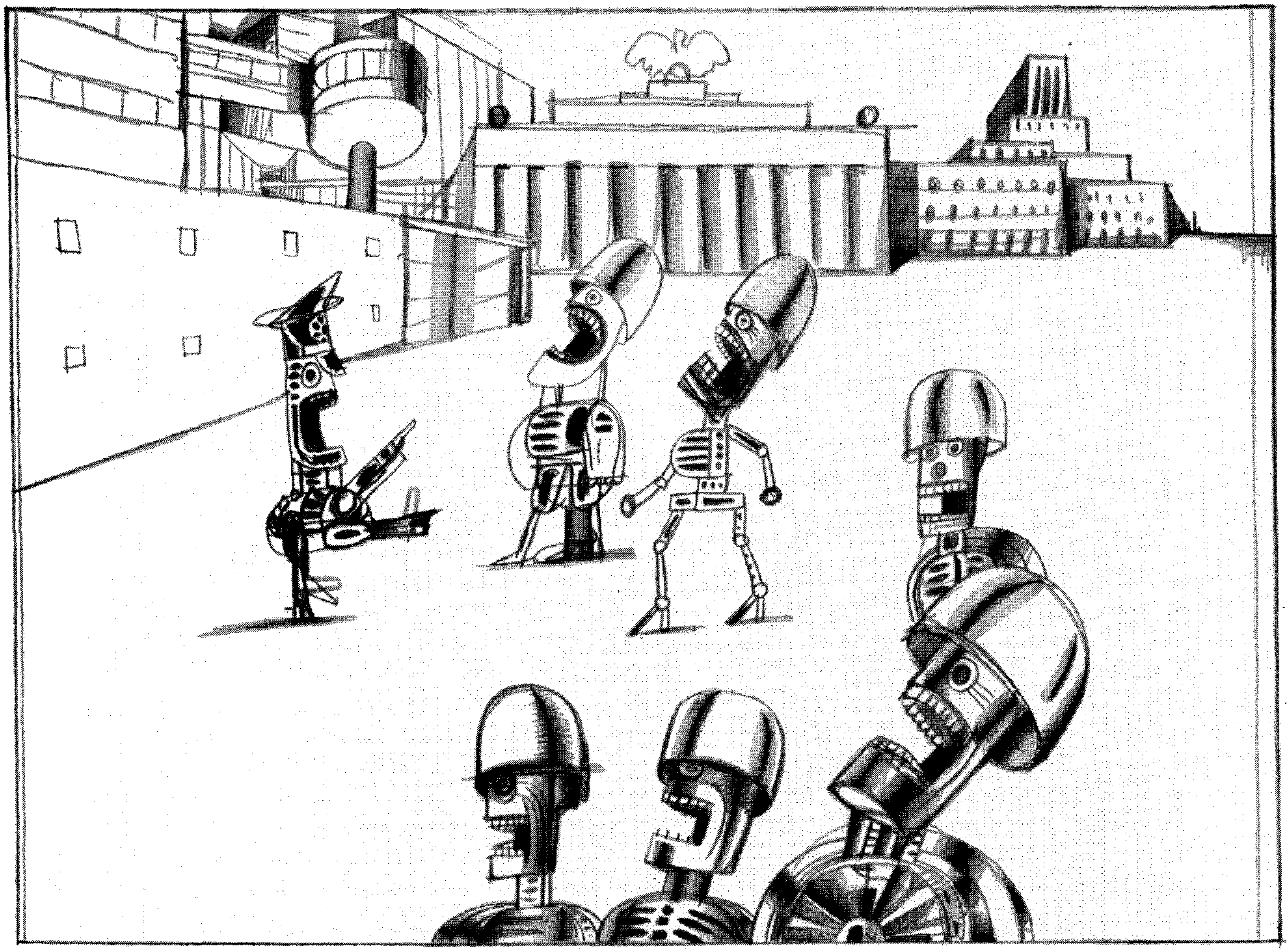
pretation is not always as good as another, and that Irving's interpretations were not just mistaken or flawed but mendacious.

Evans and Guttenplan tell us much about the issues at stake, and about the politics of memory. Guttenplan is extremely good at sketching a social context for Deborah Lipstadt: her German-Jewish milieu in New York, her years at City College and in Israel, the narrow dedication to Jewish causes. He finds the sectarianism in her book "problematic." Though he interviewed David Irving for the book, his grasp of the Englishman's social context is less assured. Evans steers clear of social or cultural interpretations, but the undisguised hostility between him and Irving in court suggests that there might have been more than historiography at stake.



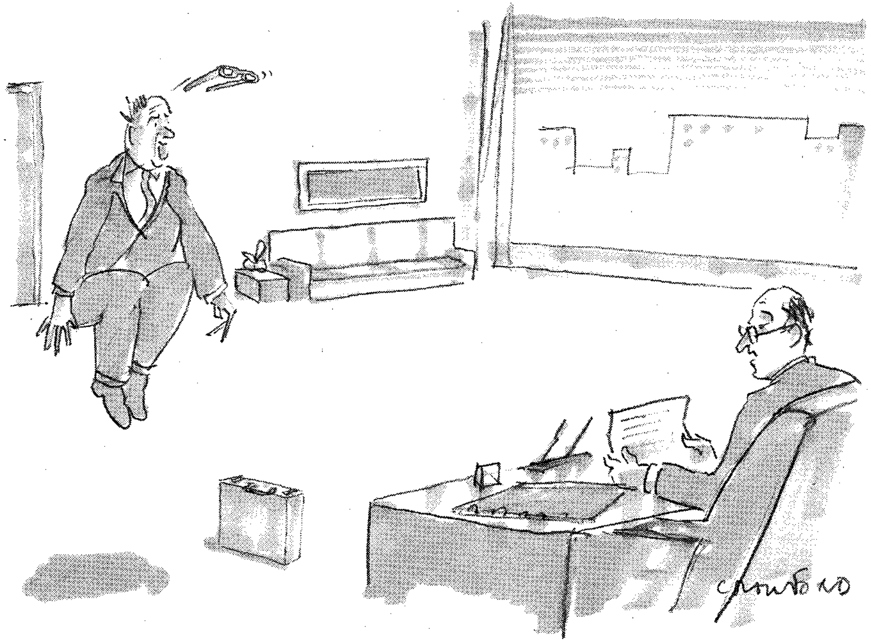
David Irving has drawn his private dramas and personal grievances into the bloody history of the twentieth century.

SAUL STEINBERG, 10/7/74

Court 37 on the Strand, in London, looked less like a court of law than a large classroom in a rather grand school. I had seen Irving once before, in 1991, in Halle, a grimy city southwest of Berlin, where he spoke to German neo-Nazis at a rowdy jamboree. A video of this occasion was shown in court as evidence of Irving's unsavory connections. Young thugs in big black boots, led by an absurd young man in leather trousers, came stomping down the cobbled streets screaming, "Foreigners out! Foreigners out! *Sieg heil! Sieg heil!*" And there was David Irving, looking like a bluff detective in his fawn British trench-coat. It seemed a very odd place for a man who prides himself on being a serious British historian. But he has spoken of the peculiar thrill of stirring up a mob in German.

He cut a different, though no less theatrical, figure in the London courtroom, where he played the role of a British barrister. In Irving v. Penguin and Lipstadt, the plaintiff had decided to act as his own counsel. In his chalk-striped blue suit and his plummy voice, he tried his best to play the part convincingly. Sir John Keegan, who was summoned as a witness for Irving, was duly impressed. While making it quite clear that he disagreed with Irving's view of Hitler's role in the Holocaust, he still liked the look of the man. Irving, Keegan wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, "is a large, strong, handsome man, excellently dressed, with the appearance of a leading QC"—Queen's Counsel. "He performs as well as a QC also, asking, in a firm but courteous voice, precise questions which demonstrate his detailed knowledge of an enormous body of material." At moments, to be sure, Irving made curious slips, as when he apparently referred to the judge as *mein Führer*. (It should also be said that the judge once or twice referred to Irving as Hitler.)

I myself couldn't keep my eyes off Irving's hands—red, beefy, boxer's hands, bunched up behind his blue-flannelled back or wrapped around a sheaf of Nazi documents. Once in a while, he would half turn to a group of people seated



"You call that high, Mr. Raskin?"

• •

behind him, including an overdressed blond woman in her forties and a man wearing a leather jacket and a death's-head signet ring. Irving would wink at them and give the thumbs-up sign when he thought he had scored a point.

Still, it was just possible, despite Irving's antics and his blowsy claque, to share Keegan's view of Irving as a class act marred by some crazy ideas. It was an impression Irving himself did his best to create, especially in his cross-examination of Richard Evans. Irving used his bespoke bulk and his posh accent as a kind of prod to rile the witness. Evans, the son of Welsh Methodists, refusing to look Irving in the eye, often wincing with irritation, and speaking in the nasal monotone of the outer London suburbs, came across as the kind of state-educated Briton who gets jumpy at the sound of an upper-class voice—or, as the English say, "chippy." Welshmen are often said to be chippy in the presence of condescending Englishmen. No wonder, then, that an American reporter called Evans at his office to inquire whether he resented Irving for class reasons.

It wasn't the first time Irving used his overbearing manner as a form of intimidation. In his diary, quoted in Guttenplan's book, Irving describes how he once confronted Deborah Lipstadt in Atlanta, where she was giving a talk about the danger of debating Holocaust deniers as though they were legitimate historians. "I boomed in my very English, very loud voice to her: 'Professor Lipstadt, I am right in believing you are not a historian, you are a professor of religion?' " He then offered a thousand dollars to anyone who could show documentary evidence of Hitler's guilt in murdering the Jews.

Guttenplan, though well aware of Irving's perversity, seeks to place his extreme views in a wider English context. He cites the anti-Semitism of authors such as Hilaire Belloc and Rudyard Kipling, as well as the attitudes of such right-wing politicians as the late Tory M.P. Alan Clark, who lamented Winston Churchill's failure to strike a deal with Hitler to preserve the British Empire. Guttenplan notes Irving's nostalgia for the old days of British imperial glory. He quotes Irving in court: "Like most fellow countrymen of my background and vintage, I regret the passing of the Old England. I sometimes think, my Lord, that if the soldiers and sailors who stormed the beaches of Normandy in 1944 could see what England would be like at the end of this century, they would not have got 50 yards up the beach. I think they would have given up in disgust."

This is indeed the kind of thing one might expect to hear in the leathery drawing rooms of certain old-fashioned English gentlemen's clubs. Is David Irving, then, the unacceptable face of English conservatism, a reactionary upper-class oddball who dares to say what members of the establishment would only mutter under their breath after having imbibed too much claret? Guttenplan doesn't go quite that far, but by taking Irving so much at face value he misses the degree to which Irving loathes the British establishment. He fails to stress how far Irving and, in their odd ways, such writers as Belloc and Kipling are removed from the mainstream.

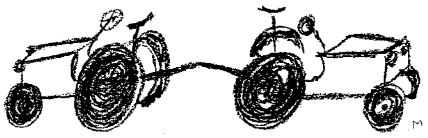
Intellectual anti-Semites often have a grievance with British society; they may feel excluded from it, perhaps because they are Roman Catholics or because they were raised abroad. Belloc was a Catholic with a French name; Houston Stewart Chamberlain—who married Richard Wagner's daughter and inspired Kaiser Wilhelm II with his racist tracts—grew up in France. Guttenplan identifies such figures with a British "culture of complaint" and with a nostalgia for a purer, whiter, more glorious Britain. And he believes that the "tokens of lost Empire and innocence seem to move Irving far more than his many objects of hatred."

I'm not sure this is quite right. Irving complains, to be sure, but nostalgia and hatred are closely linked. Guttenplan points out that Irving comes from a family with roots in the old empire: an uncle in the Bengal Lancers, a great-great-uncle in Africa, where he was supposedly eaten by his bearer. For many Englishmen, empire offered an escape from the complexities of British class society. Lording it over the natives was a way for such men to feel grander than they could ever be at home. Back in Britain, many colonials were misfits. Irving's nostalgia for empire is probably connected to his insecurity about class, that very English sense of feeling excluded.

Despite his grand manner, Irving, as Guttenplan duly finds out, is not upper class at all. In fact, his background is similar to that of his courtroom nemesis Richard Evans. Born the son of a naval officer on the dreary outer fringes of London, Irving went to the same kind of obscure private school as Evans did—better than state education, but too minor to confer any cachet. In Britain, this particular social stratum—what George Orwell called the lower-upper-middle class—is where class resentment is most keenly felt; there is the ever-present fear of sliding down a rung, and the envy of those who are higher up. This can result in an earnest, single-minded ambition to join the established ranks. Witness Richard Evans, professor of modern history at Cambridge, fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Historical Society. It can also lead to a sometimes clownish but often sour kind of radicalism, born of the desperate wish to appear grander than one really is while, at the same time, wanting to outrage the establishment. This has been Irving's chosen path.

From an early age, Irving set out to shock. He told Guttenplan what a "scamp" he had been at school, where he once hung a twelve-foot hammer-and-sickle flag over the main entrance. When he was awarded a prize for art appreciation and was asked what book he would like to receive from the Deputy Prime Minister, he requested "Mein Kampf," and alerted the local press. Later, he gained some notoriety at the University of London when a student magazine printed his claim that seventeen per cent of the students were extreme left wing or Communists—a figure he had invented. He told me he had been "a total failure" at university, but blamed a professor who was, of course, "a Communist." His hatred of those he suspects of pulling rank on him is deeper than his romantic feelings about Old England. In fact, his ostentatious Germanophilia, his gloating over British "war crimes," and the fact that he displays more generosity toward Hitler than toward Churchill suggests deep ambivalence about England.

A speech by Irving in South Africa in 1986, quoted by Richard Evans, seems to point in this direction: "We went in and we bombed the Belgians, and the Poles, and the French, and the Dutch. We did appalling damage. We killed millions of people in Europe in the most bestial way, in defiance of all conventions. In a way which eventually damned with infamy on the name of the British, and it all goes back on Winston Churchill's name."



Irving seems to be absolutely serious only in his hatreds—most of all, in his hatred of "our traditional enemies" (that is to say, "Jewish fraudsters"), of professional historians, and of anyone else he takes to represent the establishment. His reaction to losing last year's libel suit—recalled in Evans's book—was characteristic. The judge who found against him did so, in Irving's view, because he was "an up-and-coming member of the establishment." The Board of Deputies of British Jews, and supporters of the defense, who "undoubtedly . . . will come for their pound of flesh," are the establishment, too. Their lying, according to Irving, "is designed to justify . . . the bigger crimes in the financial world elsewhere that are being committed by the survivors of the Holocaust." And the greatest enemy of all is Professor Evans, as the fellow-suburbanite who made it into the academic establishment.

Irving's loathing of Evans is almost pathological. While he has called Guttenplan "an objective author," he refers to Evans, in private and on his Web site, as "odious," or that "little dumpy scowling Welshman," or the "skunk." It gave Irving intense pleasure when Heinemann, the British publisher, fearful perhaps of his litigious wrath, decided to pull Evans's book at the last minute. When Granta Books decided to take it on, Irving threatened to sue, promising that if Granta published it unchanged "they will get what is coming to them." (Granta seems to have been undeterred.) The "odious" Welshman, then, is the real enemy, and not Guttenplan, an American Jew.

The American reporter who asked Evans about his class resentment got it backward. Not Evans but Irving was the resentful one, convinced that the establishment was out to get him. In his closing arguments, Irving compared himself to the victims of McCarthyism. His career, he said, was *vernichtet*, annihilated, the word Hitler used for

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his preferred treatment of the Jews.

It's true that Evans's painstaking, often pedantic, always earnest destruction of Irving's historical claims did the most to nail him, not as a brilliant man with some very odd ideas but as a fraud who abused his gifts as a researcher. Guttenplan, as a journalist, was less of a threat, because he wasn't in a position to exclude Irving from the ranks of serious historians. Evans did just that, at every opportunity. His book, like his courtroom testimony, goes through everything Irving has written over the years, including his much acclaimed book about the bombing of Dresden, the several well-received editions of "Hitler's War," the biography of Goebbels, and many speeches and tracts in which Irving promoted his views. Evans's tone is sometimes revealing in its prickliness, as though he were defending not just historical truth but the status of academic historians. A victory for Irving, he says, "would have meant a confirmation of all the abuse that Irving had heaped upon the historical profession over the years."

But the evidence marshalled by Evans against Irving is devastating. To claim, as Irving has done on many occasions, that more people were killed by allies in the bombing of Dresden than Jews by the Nazis at Auschwitz is a good way to grab attention. But his figure of two hundred and fifty thousand (instead of the previously cited forty thousand) victims in Dresden, published in the 1966 and in subsequent editions of his book "The Destruction of Dresden," was based on a forged Nazi document. Irving had to admit it was a fake, after years of denial, yet he still went on inflating the figures in the eighties and nineties. And Irving wouldn't be Irving if he didn't add a peculiarly nasty twist to his tale. Since, in his opinion, no Jews were gassed at Auschwitz, he had to explain why so many European Jews disappeared during the war. He came up with an explanation in 1989. Many Jews had somehow managed to slip into Palestine, he said, while other Jewish survivors were "shipped westward where they ended up in cities like Dresden. I don't have to tell you what happened in Dresden three weeks after Auschwitz was evacuated by the Germans." In short, it was the Allies who killed the Jews. Churchill was the war criminal, not Hitler.

Evans's analysis of Irving's much admired "Hitler's War" is equally damning. He shows how Irving hid some of the worst statements about the Jews in footnotes, or mistranslated the German to make them sound almost innocuous. Facts were invented, such as fifty thousand Jews having fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. (Would that it were true.) And historical documents were edited to distort the facts. Irving quoted Goebbels's diary of March, 1942, as evidence that Hitler was kept in the dark about the killings in Auschwitz and Treblinka. According to Irving, Goebbels wrote about the extermination program on March 27th, but "evidently held his tongue when he met Hitler two days later." In fact, as Evans shows, Goebbels did not meet Hitler two days later but did mention on March 27th that "the Führer is the persistent pioneer and spokesman of a radical solution." Irving had conveniently left this passage out. As Evans concludes, Deborah Lipstadt was "right to describe Irving as a Hitler partisan who manipulated the historical record in an attempt to portray his hero in a favorable light." Mr. Justice Gray, in his judgment of Irving v. Penguin and Lipstadt, delivered on April 11, 2000, reached the same conclusion.

Why, then, has Irving managed to impress people like Sir John Keegan and Christopher Hitchens? Again, social context might have something to do with this. As a military historian, Sir John may not be up to scratch on Holocaust history, but he likes the cut of Irving's jib, the smart blue suit and all that, and he finds him "certainly never dull." And he does not like the look of Lipstadt at all. She seems, "by contrast," as dull "as only the self-righteously politically correct can be. Few other historians had ever heard of her before this case. Most will not want to hear from her again."

Where Keegan is a true conservative, Hitchens prides himself on being a radical on the left. Irving calls himself a radical, too, though on the other side, and the two come from the same background. Both had fathers in the middle ranks of the Royal Navy, both went to minor private schools, and they share an emotional craving for throwing eggs at the clubby Anglo-American—and, of course, Zionist—establishment. People on the left, no less than extreme right-wingers, are quick to suspect conspiracies, and tend to look for hidden proof, preferably in obscure documents, that would unmask the conspirators and make the powerful look foolish. This is why left-wing radicals are often the first to leap to the defense of extremists whose opinions are threatened with censorship, even if they don't share them. Noam Chomsky defended the right of the French Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson to publish his views, and Hitchens did the same for Irving. No doubt they were right to do so. Taboos only encourage transgressions. History is rarely an exact science. If such debatable issues as the precise number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust become holy writ, you can no longer distinguish outrageous claims from legitimate challenges, and men such as Irving gain in plausibility.

Guttenplan is brilliant in his criticism of such self-appointed censors as the Anti-Defamation League, who have turned the history of the Holocaust into a sacred text, and cast out heterodox views as blasphemy. He argues that by "describing a Holocaust outside politics, by reducing it to good Jews and bad Germans," such people have "made the deniers' task easier." For in the realm of mythology one myth is as good as another. But, as Guttenplan also says, defending Irving's right to publish does not mean you have to praise him. The Irving trial was, in any case, not about *his* right to publish but about Deborah Lipstadt's.

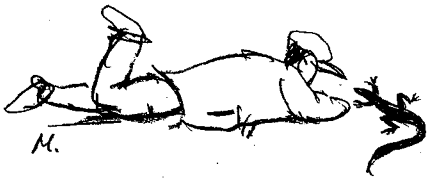
David Irving's biggest mistake was to think he could be a shock artist and be taken seriously, too. He got away with it for a long time, with some people, because of his undoubted skills as a researcher, but then, like Oscar Wilde, he challenged those who saw through him to show him up in court, and that way lay self-destruction. At another time, in another context, the man whose reputation Irving has tried so hard to salvage ended his buffoonery in self-destruction, too, but not before taking many millions with him. Irving's only victim was the truth. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Peppered Moth, *by Margaret Drabble (Harcourt; $25).* Faro Gaulden, a London science writer, has returned to Breaseborough, in South Yorkshire, where her mother's family comes from, for a lecture on genetic inheritance. How did we get here from there? a DNA researcher asks, near the start of Drabble's intricate, oddly moving new novel. The author, an omniscient, scientifically minded narrator—always ready to comment, with irony, amusement, frustration, and even pity—then leads us through the lives of Faro's grandmother, mother, and Faro herself in an attempt to answer the question of whether there is any way to escape the double inheritance of genes and habit.

A Few Corrections, *by Brad Leithauser (Knopf; $24).* At first, this exploration of a small-town Midwestern Lothario's life is like something out of Dreiser: Wesley Sultan—Rotarian, Episcopalian, and aspiring businessman—seems emphatically ordinary. The relevant characters, however, are Wesley's second wife, the brilliant, self-deprecating Sally, in France, who speaks in the style of the novels that fuel her mental life; and his brother Conrad, in Miami, riddled with disease and quite definitely raging against the dying of the light. The novel is formally constructed, each chapter offering a correction to the obituary of Wesley that appears on the first page, and this sobriety of design contrasts with the inventiveness of Leithauser's portraits.

Facing the Wind, *by Julie Salamon (Random House; $24.95).* In February, 1978, Bob Rowe, a lawyer and apparently devoted family man, murdered his wife and three children by staving in their skulls with a baseball bat. The Rowes' community was particularly horrified. One of the Rowe children, twelve-year-old Christopher, had been born blind, nearly deaf, and brain-damaged, and Bob and his wife, Mary, seemed to be committed to his welfare. Salamon's book began as a report on a support group that Mary had belonged to; then Bob Rowe's crime came up, and it eventually took over the project. There are two narratives here: the shocking crime, and then an equally shocking second act, in which Rowe avoids prison as a result of an insanity plea and starts a new life. Salamon doesn't shy away from the larger questions, both personal and institutional, but, to her great credit, she refuses to entirely abandon her original subject, and Mary Rowe's friends in the support group serve as a kind of Greek chorus.



An Unexpected Light, *by Jason Elliot (Picador; $30).* As a nineteen-year-old on holiday from his native England, Elliot crossed illegally into Soviet-occupied Afghanistan and spent weeks with the mujahideen in the mountains near Kabul. Ten years later, with the Taliban gaining strength, he returned to the country as a journalist, his cowboy streak only slightly tempered by age. What saves this book from being just a swashbuckling travelogue is Elliot's far-reaching knowledge of Afghan history and his willingness to mock himself. After begging the Afghan fighters to take him on a military operation, he finds himself crouched in a cornfield and suddenly homesick: "I knew then that I lacked the qualities necessary for guerrilla warfare."

Stirring the Mud, *by Barbara Hurd (Beacon; $23).* Swamps and bogs and their mysterious ambiguity—their perch between liquid and solid—hold a peculiar fascination for Hurd, a naturalist and poet who lives near Maryland's Finzel Swamp. Delving into these wetlands, she finds in their array of strange fauna and flora an objective correlative to the place in the mind where artistic inspiration occurs: a place of blurred borders, shifting identity, and strange odors, of rot and death, of Zen peacefulness. "To love a swamp," she writes, is to love "what shoulders its way out of mud and scurries along the damp edges of what is most commonly praised."

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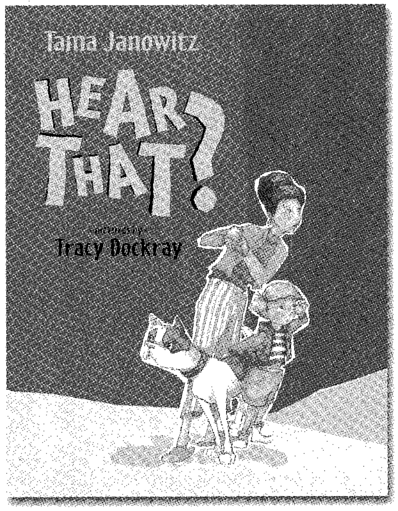

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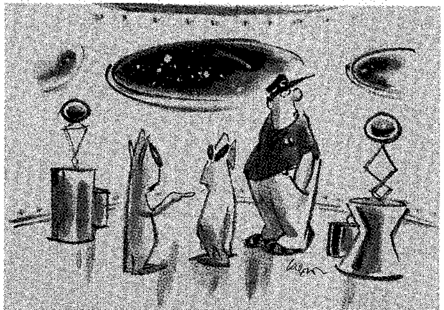
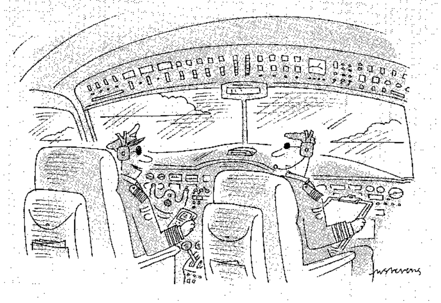
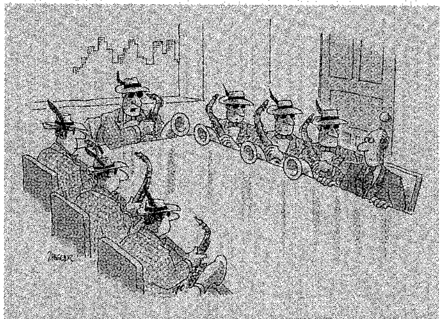


"You abducted him—*you* feed him."



"This is so cool! I'm flying this thing completely on my Palm pilot!"



"Damn it, Hopkins, didn't you get yesterday's memo?"

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THE THEATRE

BLARNEY STONES

Marie Jones takes Hollywood to County Kerry.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

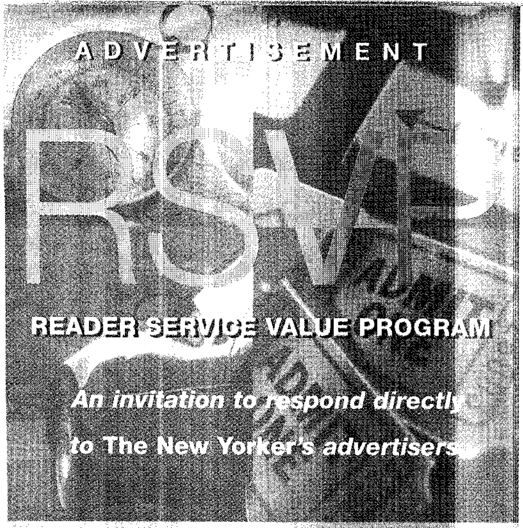
Marie Jones's "Stones in His Pockets," which began life in Jones's native Belfast a couple of years ago and made its way to Dublin and London, among other places, before coming to the Golden, in New York, gives new life to the term "working actor." The two performers, Conleth Hill and Seán Campion, play Charlie and Jake, extras on the set of a big-budget Hollywood movie being filmed in a village on the coast of County Kerry. They play thirteen other characters as well, including the female star of the movie, the director, a production assistant, and various locals. By the middle of the second act, you can see the sweat on their faces as they make their rapid transitions from role to role. It seems somehow wrong to call what Hill and Campion do a tour de force, because they look as if they're having so much fun doing it. At one point, they play alternately hyperkinetic and pensive twelve-year-old boys—first they run around the stage making airplane noises and then they sit still and ponder what they're going to do when they grow up—and that playful, boyish energy is the hallmark of their performances, which are under the direction of Ian McElhinney, Jones's husband. Hill and Campion don't have much to work with in the way of props—a couple of trunks with a few articles of clothing in them, and a row of several dozen pairs of footwear, ranging from dress shoes to work boots, at the back of the stage, which, since the play calls for only one change of shoes, are mostly for show. The lineup of shoes is a nice touch—it's as if they were filled with imaginary people waiting to be brought to life by the actors.

The rural Ireland of Jones's imagination is not quite the blighted and benighted place we've come to know from Martin McDonagh's Leenane trilogy. This Ireland is somewhat more benign: not rotten at the core but a blinkered victim of bad luck and foreign—in this case, American—exploitation. (There are odd points of convergence between McDonagh's trilogy, which is set in County Galway, and "Stones," though. The filming, fifty years ago, of "The Quiet Man," for instance, is an element of both. If you didn't know better, you might think the making of that movie was one of the signal events of the twentieth century.) Jake and Charlie are two personifications of bad luck: Jake has been to America, but he failed to make his fortune there, and has just returned home to live on the dole at his mother's house. Charlie recently abandoned his failing video-rental shop up North, after his customers deserted him in favor of a chain store and his girlfriend took up with the rival store's manager. In addition to wanting the forty pounds a day that they'll earn as extras on "The Quiet Valley," Charlie and Jake are hoping for another chance to make a go of things in the world of movies. Charlie has even written a screenplay (a very short one—he carries it folded up in his back pocket). Jake's success seems more likely, though—he is more savvy than Charlie, if only slightly more, when it comes to assessing the small part that he and Charlie play in the grand scheme of things. While waiting to be filmed for one of the star's scenes in "The Quiet Valley," Charlie asks Jake what they're supposed to do, and he replies, "Look at her lookin' at us looking dispossessed." ("The Quiet Valley" is one of those preposterous, only-in-Hollywood—or only-in-Hollywood's-version-of-Ireland—stories: a young woman from the landed gentry falls in love with a peasant, who marries her and proceeds to give the land back to the people. *Right.*) Jake then demonstrates for Charlie what's wanted: he hunches over and puts on a plaintive expression, deftly transforming himself into a beaten-down supplicant. But he knows that he and all the other extras are simply background, like the landscape itself. He tells Charlie, "It's not us they want, it's the Blasket Islands," which are off in the distance behind them.

A playful, boyish energy is the hallmark of Seán Campion and Conleth Hill's performances. Photograph by Alen MacWeeney.

"Stones in His Pockets," while not a subtle play, has its clever ways. It makes the members of the audience feel like insiders—superior, at least, to the movie-industry boors. We're cued in to nuances that the Hollywood types can't be bothered with, such as when Jake, after being summoned to coach the star on her Irish accent, tells her that she shouldn't try to speak like him—that an Irishwoman of her station wouldn't talk like the locals because she would never have mixed with them. (We'll keep that in mind for when we star in our own sweeping Irish love story.) The play pokes gentle fun at the locals as well, especially at Mickey, a creaky, somewhat stupefied old man (played by Campion) who was an extra in "The Quiet Man" and has been dining—or, rather, drinking—out on it ever since.

The stories being told in "Stones" aren't anything you haven't seen before; you just haven't seen them done this way. Some of the pleasure of the show lies in the relish with which Hill and Campion go at their parts, and some of it comes from the comic broadness of their impersonations. When Hill, whose part was written specifically for him, plays the star, he isn't playing a woman—he's imitating a woman. It's all sashaying and tossed-back hair and tugging on earrings. (Not all the parts are equally well presented—a character of Campion's who seemed like a very effeminate man was, I realized when the play was nearly over, supposed to be a woman.) "Stones" has an almost vaudevillian theatricality about it. Its crowd-pleasing ending is corny, but it's also perfect: you think it represents the triumph of the authentic over the phony, and then it occurs to you that Jones has tricked you one last time—she's written the kind of ending that could happen only in the movies. ♦



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THE CURRENT CINEMA

THE DEVIL AND MISS JONES

Love in London, mayhem in Australia.

BY ANTHONY LANE

There was much debate as to who would grab the title role in "Bridget Jones's Diary." Insiders hinted cautiously that the role might go to a medium-sized hardcover book; as for the secondary role of Bridget herself, that was even harder to call. The heroine of Helen Fielding's novel was a London girl with a weight problem, a man problem, a drinking problem, and, to cap it all, a job in publishing. Who could fill such perilous shoes? The answer was obvious: a slim and syrupy Texan with links to Jim Carrey.

As it turned out, Renée Zellweger was something of an inspired choice. She has the exact degree of emotional quiver—of belonging to the world she describes and of being worryingly set apart from it—that the part requires, and the Zellweger trick of smiling bravely on the brink of tears seems much less annoying when applied to the self-fraying Bridget. By way of research, the actress toiled undercover for weeks at a London publishing firm, where nobody recognized her. (Do these people never go to the *movies*?) The resulting accent is certainly in tune, with a dopey slur at the ends of Zellweger's yawning vowels; she even put on weight—reportedly tipping the scales at a hundred and twenty pounds, which would make most women in Hollywood feel like Sydney Greenstreet—and there is no more touching proof of her professionalism than the scene in which Bridget has to stagger around an English country garden dressed as a Playboy bunny. She looks curvy but squashed, like Betty Grable tied up with string.

The story is shamelessly simple. Bridget fancies her boss, Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant), and she is fancied by a barrister called Mark Darcy (Colin Firth). The former is a slithy tove who just wants to gimble in her wabe, the latter a stern-looking sweetie who silently loves her ("I like you very much," he says, which is an Englishman's code for uncontrollable lust), and she tacks back and forth between the two of them like a yacht. Admirers of the book will be wondering where the film finds room for the patented Bridgetisms—the calorie counts, the booze index. Well, near the beginning we see diary extracts scribbled hastily in the corner of the screen, but soon the director, Sharon Maguire, and her screenwriters, Andrew Davies, Richard Curtis, and Fielding herself, give up on the choppy, staccato attitude of the original and settle into the more comfortable, dozy rhythms of the romantic comedy: will-she, won't-she; win-one, lose-one. The presence of Curtis, who wrote "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and "Notting Hill," confirms that this new movie is aimed squarely, and unambitiously, at the same market. We get errant identities, misunderstandings that could have been cleared up in a minute, and that old standby the flubbed speech. When Bridget stood up at a publishing launch party and fumbled through a series of bloopers, I felt more embarrassed than amused, not because our heroine was mired in distress but because the distress itself felt forced: a panicky interior monologue blurted out loud.

The agony is deepened by the fact that the real Salman Rushdie and the real Jeffrey Archer appear on camera; the whole thing becomes a hugely ill-advised nod to the London literary set—a bad in-joke that will date about as well as fresh cod and will mean nothing to the wider audience that the film desires to attract. The problem spreads across the entire landscape of "Bridget Jones's Diary," with its

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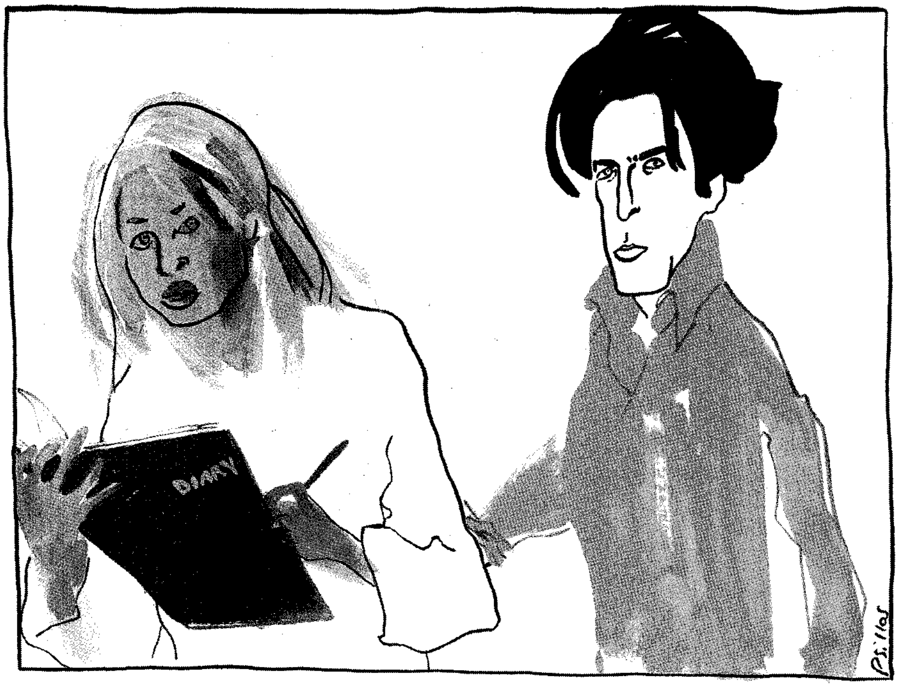
simply frightful cocktail parties and jokes about gravy. How do you prevent British movies from clotting into the posh and the parochial? Maguire gets stuck in the pastoral settings, employing the widespread dispersal of what may be the worst fake snow since records began. By way of compensation, she does something smart with the street scenes, especially at night; Bridget's final clinch with Mark, for which she wears a cardigan and tiger-striped knickers, looks more like an American smooch from the nineteen-forties than a snoggy day in London town.

Somewhere along the way, "Bridget Jones's Diary" has lost its sardonic bite, its grind of comic desperation, and softened into entertaining mush. It should therefore do solid business, pulling in couples where the novel leaned heavily on a female readership. The leading men are both so good that, according to taste, you are at liberty either to ogle them or to use them as templates for your upcoming seductions. It's not that Grant, playing the cad, is onto something new; rather, the movie has caught up with something half hidden in him—something that directors have, until now, been reluctant to explore. We see him first in closeup, emerging from an elevator, with his eyes already narrowed and his gaze sliding left and right. Is that the shiftiness of the guilty party, fearful that his secrets might be public knowledge, or the approach of a practiced carnivore checking out the prey? (There is even a hint that he introduces Bridget to anal sex; you don't get *that* in the diary.) I don't envy Colin Firth's having to compete with this monster, but he holds his own; you catch in his eye not just affection but, more subversively, a semi-suppressed amusement at the whole exhausting charade of modern romance. Having played the sorry cuckold in "The English Patient" and "Shakespeare in Love," Firth now gets his revenge, despite having to wear a homemade sweater with a reindeer on the front. Note, by the way, that his character is called Mark Darcy (he once played Mr. Darcy in a television adaptation of "Pride and Prejudice"), and that Bridget herself delivers the phrase "It is a truth universally acknowledged." Is it just me, or does this small movie have ideas above its station?



Renée Zellweger and Hugh Grant in "Bridget Jones's Diary."

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

The main difference between "Reservoir Dogs" and the new Australian film "Chopper" is that in Quentin Tarantino's film you only *think* you see the ear being sliced off. Also, the victim in "Reservoir Dogs" made something of a fuss, whereas the victim in this movie, Mark Brandon Read (Eric Bana), known as Chopper, doesn't give a squeak, apart from telling the guy with the knife to hurry up. And here's the really scary part: Chopper is fact, not fiction, and he's still alive. He farms down in "fucking Tazzy," otherwise known as Tasmania, at the butt end of the earth; but it's still a damn sight too close for me.

Chopper was a maximum-security prisoner who—despite being, as he says, "semi-bloody-illiterate"—wrote best-selling books and, on his rare excursions from jail, tried to expunge other criminals from the streets of Melbourne. Andrew Dominik's dramatization of Chopper's life admits to taking liberties, but then Chopper himself took even greater liberties with other people's legs and heads, and the portrait that emerges is all too credible. We begin in 1991, then reach back to 1978 and hack our way through the intervening years, reviewing the parade of Chopper's feuds and fancies. As played by Bana, he maintains the weird snobbery of the genuine psychotic, whose values are upside down but holding perfectly steady; when his fellow-prisoner Jimmy (Simon Lyndon) stabs him six or seven times, Chopper is badly hurt—pained and offended, that is, but not in any actual *pain*. "You want to lie down?" asks a concerned Jimmy as blood streams from his friend's wounds and overruns his tattoos. "What for?" asks Chopper, as if he were being offered a seat on a bus. If you try to kill Chopper, he won't kill you back; but if he shoots you and you try to forgive him, watch out. Imagine Nietzsche with a bottle of beer and a torso like a cave painting, and you're halfway there.

Is there any defending the violence of this picture, in which every scene feels primed to explode? Not really, although I would say that Dominik is admirably unbothered by cool; there is no attempt to suck up to Tarantino and lend the nastiness a tincture of chic. Also, we absolutely understand why Chopper—a "fucking show pony," according to Jimmy—held the public in his grip. As the cult of celebrity accelerates hellward, we should expect to see other Choppers in our midst, or on our TV screens. For now, we are left to wonder how a man could be the best kind of Australian—funny, articulate, and irreverent—and yet the worst kind of human being. As for Bana's horrendously winning performance, I was reminded of another Australian movie, "Romper Stomper," made in 1992, which told of a gang of neo-Nazis with a high-intensity leader. He was played by someone called Russell Crowe. ◆

THE BACK PAGE BY BRUCE McCALL

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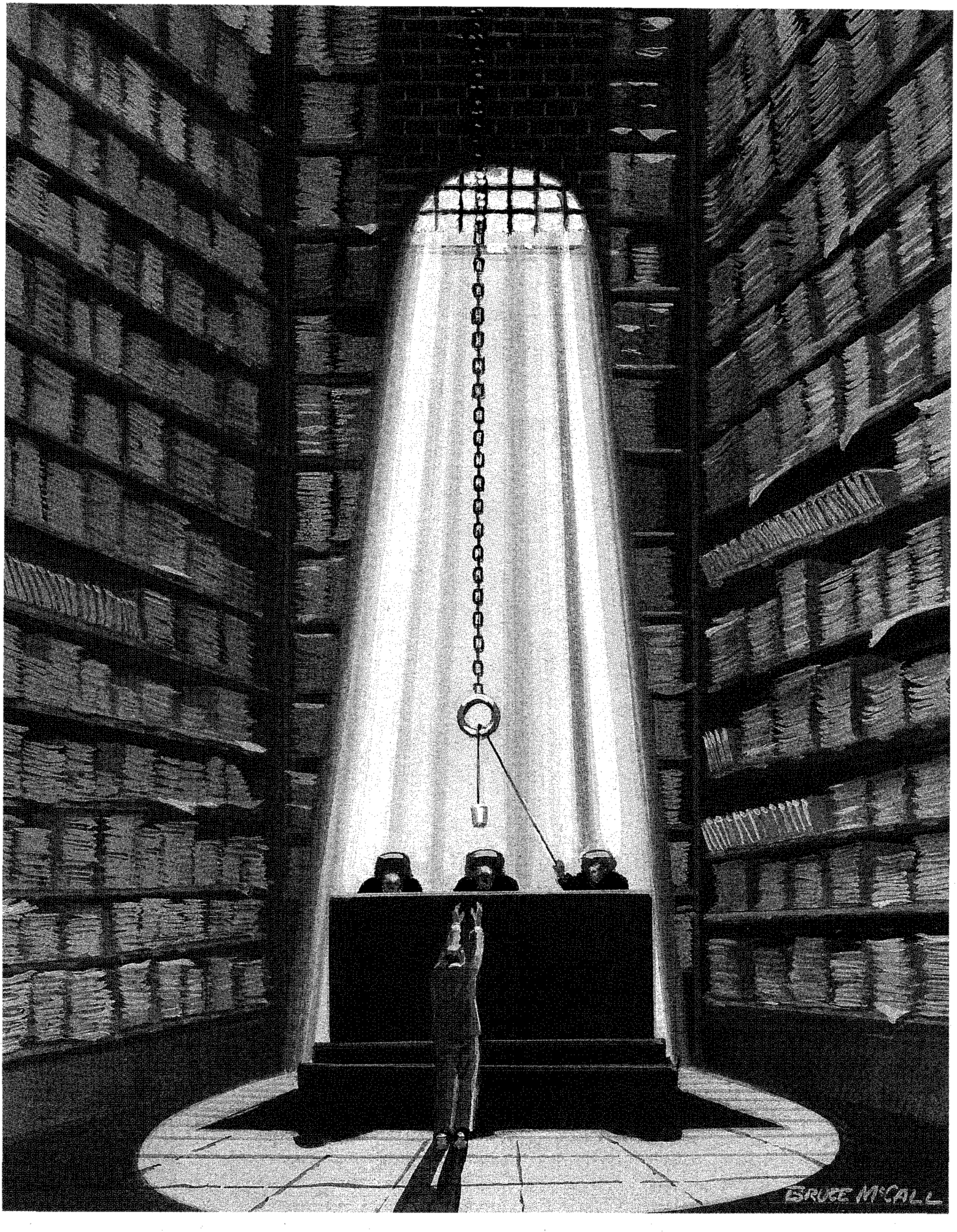
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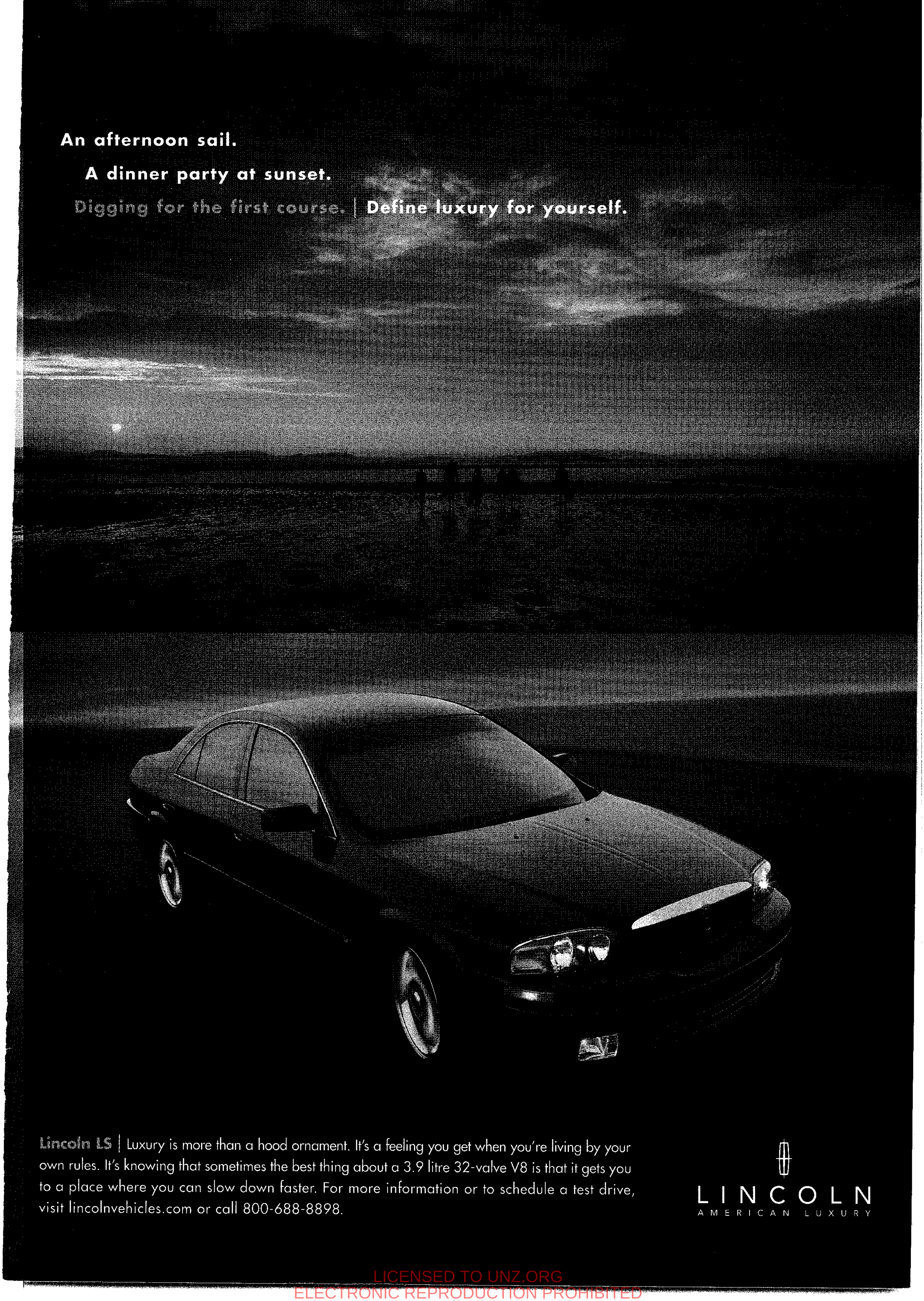
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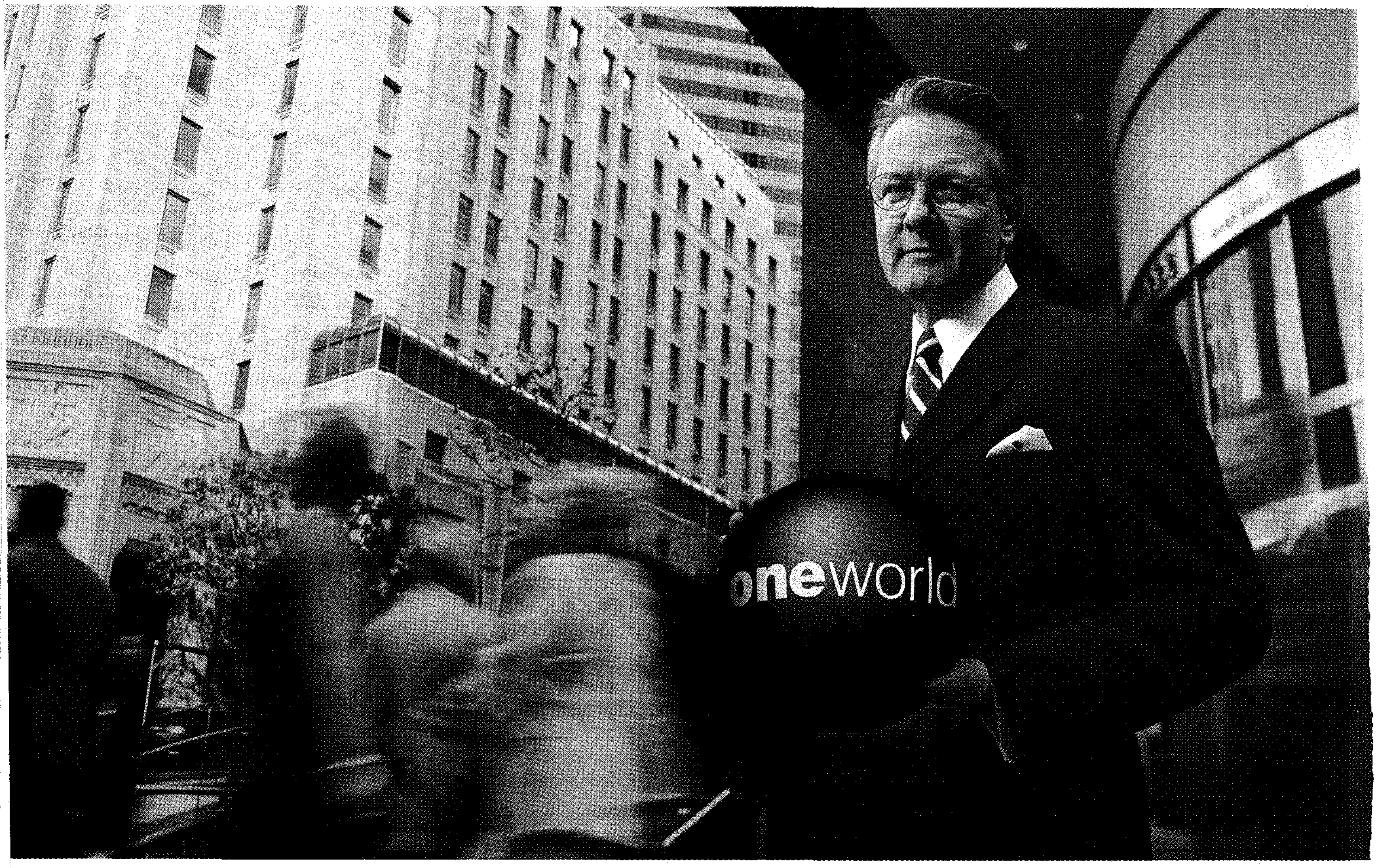

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